

DLR COVID-19 MOBILITY REVIEW

Phase 3 Findings: June 2025



Blackrock Main Street 4-year Covid Mobility Follow-On: Economic Development & Business Feedback Study

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This research reports on the findings from an area based economic development and business-community focused study of Blackrock Main Street and immediately adjacent streets, which is intended to complement and extend research previously conducted in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council's (DLR's) 'Covid-19 Mobility & Public Realm Works' (herein called 'Covid Mobility') project. This study (Phase 3) seeks to test the following hypothesis:

'that the temporary 'Covid Mobility' project in Blackrock Main Street/Village Centre (involving road space reallocation and public realm expansion) has contributed to the regeneration of Blackrock Main St/Village Centre (over time). It has brought about predominantly positive changes and remains popular among the business community.'

The study also seeks to gain an understanding of the key reasons for the attraction of new business to Blackrock Main Street/Village.

The study is based on participant interviews, and is largely limited to businesses located directly along the Main Street and the immediately adjacent streets (George's Street, Bath Place, Temple Road), as well as a business representative association (see further details in Section 2).

This study is particularly significant within an Irish context as it contributes to the knowledge gap that currently exists in relation to the role of road space reallocation and public realm reclamation and expansion, in the socio-economic regeneration of Main Streets and village/urban centres.

In terms of structure, Section 1 outlines the background and context to the study. Section 2 provides an overview of the methodology used to support the research. Section 3 outlines the findings, and Section 4 provides a summary of the overall findings and concludes with reflections on the hypothesis.

1.2 Background and Context

The wider TU Dublin 'DLR Covid-19 Mobility Review' study, of which this report forms part of, has been carried out and reported in the following phases:

- Phase 1 DLR Covid-19 Mobility Review (June 2021) explores the short-term (approx. 6 months-1 year) social-economic mobility impacts of the public realm and mobility works in Blackrock Main Street, and the short-term mobility impacts of the Coastal Mobility Route (CMR). It involved developing and piloting evaluation and audit methodologies to assess the Covid-19 mobility and public realm works in Blackrock Village and on the Coastal Mobility Route (CMR).
- Phase 1-b CMR Mobility Update (July 2022) followed a recommendation from the Phase 1 review for ongoing monitoring. It focused on the Coastal Mobility Route with monitoring and evaluation of the changing mobility patterns throughout 2021 and 2022, as continued responses to the Covid - 19 pandemic changed and evolved.
- Phase 2-a CMR Economic Development & Community Business Feedback (February 2023) explores feedback from the business community along the Coastal Mobility Route.

- Phase 2-b DLR Covid-19 Mobility Review - Dundrum Village explores the socio-economic and mobility impacts of the Covid Mobility works in Dundrum Village/Main Street.
- Phase 3, as presented in this report, is a medium term 4-year economic development and business feedback follow-on study on the impact of the Covid Mobility works in Blackrock Main Street, and surrounding streets.

This and all phases of this TU Dublin research have been carried out independently with mixed methods research and analysis. Key findings from the Phase 1 June 2021 interim study into the Covid Works in Blackrock included:

- There are high levels of support from businesses and the community for the temporary redesign and reallocation of road space along Blackrock Main Street and a strong desire to retain the public space gains in the future.
- Considerable improvements in the provision and quality of cycling infrastructure within the study area (which includes the Coastal Mobility Route) have been realised, leading to a significant increase in the number and range of people cycling.
- Based on the success of the temporary works, TU Dublin recommended that a permanent regeneration plan be developed for Blackrock Village in consultation with residents, businesses and other stakeholders (see Section 1.4 for further details on DLR's response to this recommendation).
- During the Phase 1 study timeframe, traffic patterns changed dramatically, shifting away from traditional morning peak commuting towards higher levels of more locally based journeys during the day and evenings. These findings were reflective of regional as well as international trends associated with Covid-19 travel restrictions that were in place at the time.

Covid-19 and Government Guidance in relation to Mobility and Public Realm Works:

As time passes, it can be easy to forget the significant impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had in Ireland from the early months of 2020. On the 22 May 2020, the National Transport Authority issued correspondence to Local Authorities acknowledging this:

"The Covid-19 pandemic has affected all our lives and the way in which we work, socialise and communicate. It also has had enormous impacts on our transport system, radically reducing current travel levels and likely to alter our patterns of movement for some time to come. In addition, it has dramatically impacted businesses, requiring new operational approaches by many retailers, restaurant, cafes and other businesses for many months to come".¹

The levels of societal and economic 'lockdown' varied as differing waves of Covid-19 saw the closure of all but 'essential' retail and services, and 'stay-at-home' and 'work-from-home when possible' orders being put in place. It wasn't until February 2022 that most restrictions, including mandatory mask-wearing were finally removed.

On the 23rd June 2020, the Government of Ireland provided an Interim Advice Note in response to an escalating requirement to mitigate the Covid-19 related health, socio-economic and mobility challenges².

¹ National Transport Authority correspondence to Local Authorities <https://www.dmurs.ie/supplementary-material>

² INTERIM ADVICE NOTE - Covid 19 Pandemic Response. <https://www.dmurs.ie/supplementary-material>

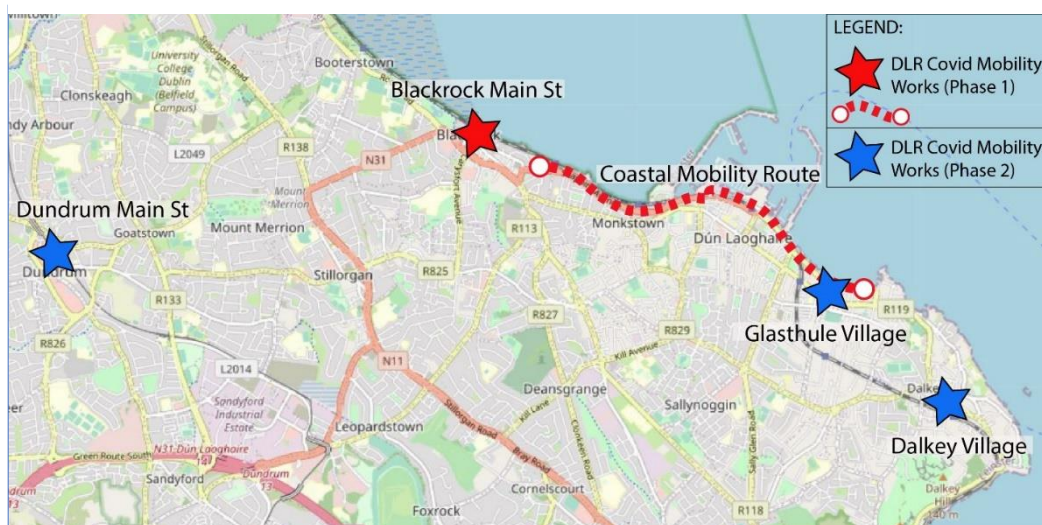
This note was complementary to the Governments' 'Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets' (DMURS)³ which outlines Government policy on urban design street. Funding supports were also offered for putting in place improved walking and cycling infrastructure nationwide. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (DLR) was one of the first Local Authorities in Ireland to introduce significant mobility and public realm measures in response to some of the challenges associated with Covid-19.

Referred to in this document as 'Covid-19 Mobility and Public Realm works' (or simply 'Covid Mobility' works), these included the reconfiguration and redesign of Blackrock Village Main Street, the introduction of the Coastal Mobility Route (CMR) cycle-way along the coast road from Seapoint to Sandycove, followed by Covid-19 works in Glathule Village, Dundrum Village and Dalkey Village (see Figure 1).

DLR's key objectives of the 'Covid Mobility' works were to:

- Increase outdoor social distancing space for pedestrians in villages;
- Increase cycling and pedestrian comfort and safety;
- Reduce pressure on public transport capacity by providing a sustainable mobility alternative;
- Decrease reliance on private vehicles for short journeys, while increasing the use of walking and cycling as transport modes for a wide range of users; and
- Support economic development in villages/urban centres.

Figure 1 Showing DLR's key Covid-19 Mobility and Public Realm Projects (source map from Openstreetmap.org, adapted by author)



³ <https://www.dmurs.ie/>

1.3 Covid Mobility Works in Blackrock

The Covid Mobility works in Blackrock were introduced over two stages – the ‘engineering’ or road-space reallocation stage in June 2020, and the ‘placemaking’ stage in July 2020 (see Figure 2). They were in line with the above noted objectives, broadly to facilitate safe physical distancing, businesses reopening post the initial lockdown and options for more active mobility⁴. DLR’s Covid Mobility focus in Blackrock was in widening footpaths, providing areas for outdoor seating and dining, and creating safer cycle facilities. Additional non-infrastructure supports were also provided to mitigate the impact of the lockdown that particularly affected the retail and hospitality sectors. These included financial aid for businesses, the Pandemic Unemployment Payment for affected individuals⁵, and a restart grant for micro and small businesses⁶.

Figure 2 First stage road space reallocation in Blackrock Main Street, June 2020 (top photos); Second stage ‘Placemaking’ phase (bottom photos)



The Covid Mobility works in Blackrock involved the conversion of the 2-way trafficked Main Street to a new southbound one-way vehicular traffic arrangement from Rock-Hill and along the Main Street to the junction with Temple Road and Carysfort Avenue, and a northbound contraflow segregated bicycle-lane along the Main Street. The reallocated road space was largely given over to additional pavement space,

⁴ The initial lockdown in Ireland began on March 12, 2020. Restrictions were gradually lifted in phases, and the country moved through different levels of lockdown measures. Pubs serving food were allowed to reopen in late June and "wet" pubs, or pubs that do not serve food did not reopen until September 2020.

⁵ The COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) was a social welfare payment for employees and self-employed people who lost their employment due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

⁶ More information can be found here: [https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/fe8f00-government-outlines-further-measures-to-support-businesses-impacted-/](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/fe8f00-government-outlines-further-measures-to-support-businesses-impacted/)

seating areas and public realm. New car-parking and loading bays were included. There was also some minor direction of some bus services due to the one-way system. The scheme was supported traffic-wise by Frascati Road, which was designed originally as a by-pass for the village.

Figure 3 Schematic of proposed Covid Mobility one-way system through Blackrock Village (source: https://www.dlrcoco.ie/sites/dlrcoco/files/atoms/files/dlr_blackrock_one-way_schematic_may_2020.pdf)

SCHEMATIC OF PROPOSED ONE WAY SYSTEM THROUGH BLACKROCK VILLAGE:



1.4 'Living Streets' Permanent Plan for Blackrock Main Street/Village

DLR secured a funding commitment for a permanent scheme in Blackrock and went out to public consultation on the proposals for the permanent scheme in May/June 2023. The permanent scheme proposals received a high level of public support⁷ and 'Living Streets Blackrock' was approved by the Elected Members in July 2023, and construction is imminent (at the time of writing). It is largely based on the street configurations introduced in the Covid Mobility project (i.e. the one-way street; a contraflow bicycle lane, and extended footpaths and public realm), with some changes. It includes the use of permanent, rather than temporary materials; an expansion of the cycle-network connecting the Newtown Avenue cycle lane with the Main Street cycle lane; a substantial increase in bicycle parking; a change to the bicycle-lane design to be more aligned with the National Transport Authority's Cycle Design Manual⁸ (2023); removal of traffic-lights at some junctions; additional/new bus layover areas; and relocation of some car-parking spaces to Temple Road.

⁷ For more information, see <https://dlrcoco.citizenspace.com/infrastructure-climate-change/living-streets-blackrock-village/results/livingstreetsblackrockpart8cereportvf.pdf>

⁸ See <https://www.nationaltransport.ie/publications/cycle-design-manual/>

Figure 4 Images of the approved permanent plans for 'Living Streets, Blackrock'. The permanent plans are largely based on the temporary Covid Mobility works street configuration, and include a further expansion of the cycle-network (images source: DLR [Living Streets Blackrock Village - Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council - Citizen Space](#))



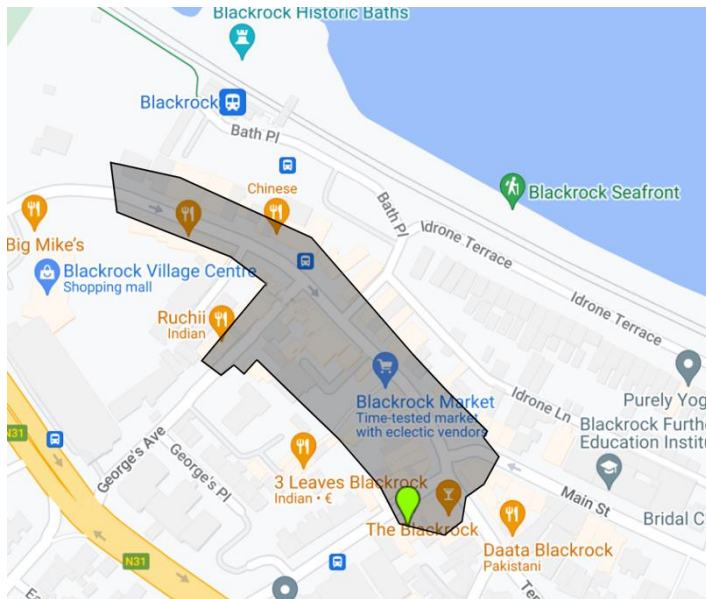


2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Methodology - Interviews

This economic development and business community feedback interviews were largely conducted through the Summer of 2024, with an additional interview taking place in Autumn 2024. The scope of this phase of the research largely focused on street-level businesses located along Blackrock Main Street and immediately adjacent streets (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Approximate extent of interview sample study area in Blackrock (image base map from openstreetmap.org, adapted by author).



The businesses within scope were contacted and invited to participate in an interview. The Chair of the Business Association⁹ facilitated a number of introductions to business owners/managers for the research team. These introductions are particularly beneficial within a traders setting and resulted in a high participation rate. All businesses on the large Blackrock Business Association mailing list¹⁰ were also contacted and invited to interview through the monthly 'Blackrock Business and Community Newsletter'. A wide range of businesses were contacted, including businesses from different sectors, as well as established businesses, established businesses that had also recently expanded or invested considerably in their business, and new businesses to the study area.

In addition, and to capture a broader or more holistic view of economic activity in Blackrock Village, the invitation to interview was also extended to the Blackrock Business Association. Of the 55 street level occupied and trading units within the study area ('Blackrock Market' is calculated as one entity for the purposes of numbers in this case), 19 traders/businesses agreed to participate (representing a robust 35% of the businesses). In addition, 3 more interviews were secured, taking the total number to 22 – the Blackrock Business Association, a business from within the local shopping centre, and a local professional services business. The latter, despite being outside of the immediate study area, offered to interview which was agreed to due to their active role within business development within the village. A range of business

⁹ For further information, see [The Blackrock Business Association](#)

¹⁰ According to the BBA, their mailing list is sent to 1,020 businesses and interested people within the community.

sectors participated including hospitality (cafés, restaurants, pubs), a range of retail (e.g. pharmacy, clothes, convenience, furniture, other specialty), and services (hair dressers, estate agents, dental) (see Table 1).

The 19 traders/businesses included:

- 3 new businesses that started trading in the village/Main Street during 2024,
- 1 business that opened in recent years;
- 2 established businesses that have invested significantly in their business development recently; and,
- 13 other established businesses.

Table 1 Showing the number and composition of research participants

Business Sector	Number	Interviewee Role
Business Representative Group	1	Chair
Hospitality	6	Owners, Senior Managers
Retail (inc. specialty, grocery)	10	Senior Managers
Professional & Other Services	4	Owners/Directors, Senior Managers
Other	1	Manager

A semi-structured interview format was chosen as the appropriate data collection method in this instance because it offered the opportunity to investigate specific themes or questions in detail while allowing the flexibility to modify questions as necessary. This was an important consideration in the context of the study, given the diversity of businesses and groups involved. In addition, the semi-structured format tends to have more probative value and supports open and interactive dialogue.

The primary aims of the interviews questions are to (a) explore the business views on the continuing role of the 'Covid Mobility & Public Realm' works to the medium term (four years post works) regeneration and economic development of Blackrock Main St/Village; (b) gain an understanding of the key reasons for the attraction of new business to Blackrock Main Street/Village.

The central hypothesis being tested is that the temporary Covid Mobility & Public Realm project in Blackrock Main Street/Village Centre (involving road space reallocation and public realm expansion) has contributed to the regeneration of Blackrock Main St/Village Centre (over time), and that it has brought about predominantly positive changes and remains popular among the business community. The questions included varied somewhat depending on the target group, i.e., (a) new businesses; (b) established businesses that have recently invested and/or expanded their business considerably; (c) other established businesses; and (d) business representation group. Although there was some variety in the questions due to the semi-structured nature of the interview approach, general question themes included:

- The perspective of the trader/business as to how the Covid Mobility Works have impacted their business four years on, and the potential role of other factors on trade and footfall.
- Whether the Covid Mobility Works resulted in any changes to how their business now operates, and if so, how those changes are working out.
- If there are certain characteristics about Blackrock Main Street/Village that the business particularly appreciates, or if there are elements they would like to see modified or changed in some way.

-
- If they had any views on the future plans to make the temporary Covid Mobility Works permanent, and other redevelopment plans for the seafront and park area.
 - Questions around their engagement in the wider business community of the village.
 - An open question seeking any additional relevant information or feedback.

For established businesses, additional feedback was also sought on their views of how Blackrock Main Street/Village performs now compared with previous years and decades. For new business, views were also sought as to why they picked Blackrock Main Street/Village as a location for their business, and what their experiences of the Main Street/Village are so far as a place to do business.

For the Blackrock Business Association, views were also sought on level of business engagement in the community and the Association; on the performance of the Main Street/Village and its trading environment relative to previous years; and any specific feedback received from members regarding the Covid Mobility Works.

Content and Thematic Analysis:

In keeping with the explorative nature of the study, the findings are largely based on a thematic analysis methodology, whereby commonly recurrent themes or patterns were identified and extracted from the interview transcripts (Bryman, 2012). Within interview based research, there is much debate on minimum sample sizes for qualitative research (e.g., Wutich, Beresford & Bernard, 2024). Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) contend that within their case study that the vast majority (92%) of the total set of thematic discovery (codes generated) in interviews occur in the first 12 interviews. Thus, this sample of 19 traders (out of a population of 55) in addition to the business representative group and 2 others should be a reliable sample, particularly in this case where a key aim is to understand ‘common perceptions and experiences’ among a relatively homogeneous group (i.e. traders/businesses).

The interview content was analysed and coded manually, of which 16 themes were identified (see Table 2). Coding refers to the process of breaking down and organising data into component parts, which are given names (Bryman, 2012). These codes then contribute to the development of important and overarching themes. Under a number of themes, the codes tend to represent ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ views depending on the outlook of a particular business (the extent of positive or negative views are explored in Section 3 Findings). The themes marked in bold and with two Asterix** are found to be the strongest and most important themes arising from the interviews; one Asterix* are used to denote medium-strong and important themes; and no asterix are other important themes arising. Other miscellaneous codes are also listed in Table 2 overleaf.

Table 2 Themes & Coding Scheme

	KEY THEMES	CODES
1.	Footfall, Street Vibrancy & Vitality**	Increased footfall; increased street life & vibrancy; thriving on Saturdays, Sundays & sunny days; safe area; nice area; street socialising; more unit occupancy/less vacancy; more support for local businesses.
2.	Outdoor Seating; Greenery & Outdoor Trading Areas**	Additional outdoor trading space; places to sit down; outdoor seating is appreciated; outdoor socialising; more people using the outdoors; well-used benches by a wide range of people; being outdoors is good for health & community; picnic tables good for dwell-time & atmosphere; people coming specifically to eat & drink outdoors; improved quality of life; small investment in wooden seating provides a large return on investment; greenery appreciated; need to also extend public seating to side streets.
3.	Covid Mobility Works**	Wide footpaths & better pedestrian environment welcomed; walkable sociable environment; family & dog friendly; cycling improvements welcomed; greenery & seating are great; Covid Works helped trading environment during pandemic; contributed to area being more 'Up & Coming' & drawing people to the area; Main St. has greatly improved & changed positively; happy with Covid Works; has a positive impact on the village; the Main St. redesign has worked; a small investment has led to a big return on investment; Covid Works have been negative for the village; need for barrier free & at-grade Main St to make it easier to walk/cross.
4.	Atmosphere, Village & Community Feel**	Stylish, attractive & friendly village; ambient feel & increased dwell-time; return of a 'Main Street' atmosphere; 'village' feel; nice feel; good atmosphere especially on sunny weekends; sense of community in village; safe village; seaside village-feel enhanced; lack of 'village atmosphere'.
5.	Active, Engaged & Welcoming Business Community**	Organised location to do business; active & engaged business community & local business association; good business communications; welcoming, supportive & hard working business association/network; some businesses maintaining street greenery etc; limited financial contributions to business association by some; importance of events incl. public events; time commitment associated with business association role.
6.	Business Health, Adaptation & Sustainability*	Good weekend & sunny day trade; changes seems good for traders; turnover slightly up; trade is better than expected & seeking to expand; trading & footfall changed a lot since Covid esp. with work-from-home for office works & changing customer habits; adapting business to changing customer habits; the new street atmosphere also bringing business opportunities; Covid Works helped during Covid; pandemic fallout is still being felt; trade is static or down especially mid-week.
7.	Bicycle Infrastructure*	Cycle lanes bringing customers & people to village; cycle-parking area bringing customers to adjacent shops/cafes; importance of wider cycle network; black rubber defender kerbs (cycle lane segregation) as tripping hazard; frustrating with cyclists using carriageway; clearer signage needed for cyclists; cycle-lane unnecessary infrastructure in the Main Street & would be better as more car-parking areas; poor location of some cycle-parking in sunny street areas.
8.	Blackrock 'On the Up' and as a 'Destination'*	Reestablished Main Street as a destination (again); has raised town profile; more up-market now; coffee destination; destination for cyclists; transformed from a 'ghost-town' & from going 'downhill'; becoming more well-known location; a place 'On-the-Up'; attracting new businesses to the area; more cosmopolitan now.
9.	Agglomeration Economies, Magnet Businesses & Diversity of Offer*	Magnet business types drive more exposure & footfall for all businesses; many other business types also benefitting from people coming for the coffee shops etc; diverse & balanced business offering in village; little bit of everything; coffee shops, food places &

		good weather bring people into Blackrock; greater choice of restaurants & pubs now; village is more attractive place now to conduct business meetings with diversity of offer.
10.	Car-Parking & Parking Management *	Car-parking should be short-term only; a centralised 'park and then walk' approach to car-parking would be welcome with pedestrian set-down areas; car-parking unnecessary to type of business; customers have adapted to new car-parking situation; car-parking has always been an issue and people need to learn to adapt/manage; car-parking is too expensive & monitored by wardens; more car-parking would be welcome/needed & important not to lose any more car-parking spaces; change bicycle lane to car-parking; accessing car-parking with one-way system is difficult.
11.	Seafront Development Opportunity*	Under-utilised seafront area; currently turn our backs on the sea & as a lost opportunity; better integration of Main Street with seafront needed; good idea to redevelop the bus terminus & bring back the Baths & put in proper seating & walking routes by the sea; uninviting area by the train station; links to Blackrock Park are important including widening the current alleyway; important not to over-commercialise the seafront; objection to losing any more car-parking down at the seafront.
12.	Traffic Management (Vehicular)*	Traffic calming; traffic rat-run through Main Street removed; less traffic; less traffic noise; one-way traffic is a good idea; a small amount of traffic is good for business exposure; benefits of increased pedestrianisation; one-way traffic system is less convenient/accessible for car-based visitors & shoppers and for loading/deliveries and looking for car-parking; one-way system does not allow for breakdowns etc.
13.	Loadings & Deliveries	No issues with deliveries; issues with loading bays always been full, or customers parking in them (enforcement issues); not enough loading bays; previous informal street arrangement allowed easier loading & deliveries (which one-way system doesn't allow for).
14.	Macro-Economic Conditions, & Post-Covid Societal & Customer Habits Change	Impacts of working from home inc. numbers of office staff no longer using the Main Street as much as pre Covid; impacts of pandemic still being felt and still changing today; cost-of-living crisis (and international wars) impacting people's spending power & confidence; increased costs of doing business; impacts of 2008 Global Financial Crisis still being felt; difficulties getting staff for businesses/ staff shortages; changing consumer habits post-Covid and how this effects people's use of the Main Street including outdoors, health, leisure time, weekends etc.
15.	Town Centre Management & Maintenance	Well maintained Main Street; temporary works poorly maintained & needs maintenance programme; Main Street including street furniture starting to look 'tatty'.
16.	Permanent Works Construction Management	Short term pain of construction will be worth it in the long run; speedy construction needed to reduce impact on businesses; concern over length of works, noise & dust on business; works need to commence asap; car-parking management needed for contractors; maintaining two-sided visibility & accessibility of Main Street during construction important for business viability.
17.	Other (miscellaneous)	Active & engaged local Councillors including tidy-towns, good working relationship with Council Executive; negative impact of double decker buses on a traditional Main Street; important role of community in tidy towns, championing change in the Main Street, volunteering for events etc.



3. FINDINGS

3.1 Introduction

This study seeks to assess the views of businesses in Blackrock Village towards the ‘Covid Mobility’ works four years on from their implementation. As outline in Section 1.3, the Covid Mobility works were implemented in the summer of 2020 as part of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The overall findings indicate that the **business and business representative community of Blackrock Village (that contributed to this study) predominantly view the project as a positive circa four years on from its implementation.**

Out of the 19 traders/businesses based on the Main Street or immediately adjacent streets, 17 (c.90%) have a positive sentiment overall (including some nuances which are explained further below); 1 (c.5%) has a negative sentiment overall, and 1 (c.5%) does not clearly express an overall positive or overall negative sentiment. The traders/businesses interviewed are from a wide range of sectors including hairdressers, dentist, pubs, restaurants, cafés, general and specialty retail, pharmacy, grocery/convenience, market management and estate agents. They included long established businesses, recently established and new businesses, as well as established business that have recently invested and expanded. The business representative body also expressed very positive views to the Covid Mobility works. Out of the two additional interviews undertaken of businesses outside of the Main Street and adjacent streets area, one expressed very positive overall sentiment, and one did not clearly express a view either way.

In particular, businesses noted:

- the improved impact on **footfall, street vibrancy and vitality** around Blackrock Main Street;
- an improved sense of **atmosphere, and village feel** to Blackrock Village;
- a particular appreciation of the **new outdoor seating, greenery** and additional trading areas;
- an **active and welcoming business community** where business development and building village identity are also fostered; and
- an overall **positive feeling to the Covid Mobility** works and an overall feeling that ‘it worked’, and the trading conditions through the pandemic would probably have been worse without it. Businesses are able to recognize the potential impacts of **wider macro-economic issues** such as the cost-of-living crisis and **post-Covid societal changes**, such as work-from-home, and how the trading environment is still somewhat in a **state of post-pandemic flux**.

There is also a strong sense that:

- Blackrock has been re-established as a **destination again** after many years in decline, is ‘**on-the-up**’, and is attracting both new types of businesses and customers;
- people/customers are particularly attracted to the Main Street area by certain types of ‘**magnet businesses**’, but many other business types also benefit from this exposure and improved town profile;
- the one-way trafficked street and associated reduced through-traffic is generally a **trade-off worth having** for the additional footpaths, outdoor trading areas and public spaces, planting and seating areas, but that loadings/deliveries and access to car-parking areas must be well thought-through and managed (so that people aren’t driving around frustrated in circles);
- there are more varied views associated with bicycle and related infrastructure, with the economic and social value of being part of a **wider quality cycle network (particularly one with high amenity and leisure value)** being recognised, but with the central issue being with the rubber

black 'defender' kerbs and their associated trip hazard (making them an inappropriate piece of infrastructure for a Main Street environment); and

- businesses would also like to see greater links with Blackrock Park, and would like to see the Main Street integrate with a **more welcoming and attractive seafront area** – there is a feeling that it is currently a wasted opportunity.

The themes identified in Table 2 in Section 2.1 have been consolidated and discussed in further detail below under the following subheadings:

- Footfall, Street Vibrancy & Vitality
- Main Street Atmosphere & Village Feel
- Popularity of Outdoor Seating, Planting, & Trading Areas
- Active, Engaged & Supportive Business Community
- Blackrock 'On-the-Up': A Destination Again
- Business Health, Macro-Economics & Post-Covid Societal Change
- Traffic, Car-Parking Management & Loadings/Deliveries
- Bicycle Infrastructure & Main Street Environments
- Maintenance of Temporary Infrastructure, Future Aspirations & Moving on to Permanent Works.

3.2 Footfall, Street Vibrancy & Vitality

'it's brought life to the Main Street. You'd almost say the best thing that happened at the Main Street was Covid.'

(no. 1, established hospitality business)

The strongest theme that arose from the interviews is that a clear majority of businesses noted that there is a great sense of vitality and vibrancy in Blackrock Main Street, and for those businesses that were in place before the pandemic, there is an overarching conclusion that this is a change brought about by the Covid Mobility Works.

'...all the Covid changes have brought life to the cafés. I used to come on Sunday morning to work, this place would be dead around 10 o'clock. Now you come here at 10 o'clock on a Sunday morning, it's coffee wars, there's people everywhere. People sit down in the street, it's great change, it's much more vibrant as a village.' (no. 11, established retail business)

'I think anybody who's seen Blackrock will say - before 2020 - and sees it now would say that the vibrancy of the village, I think above all else, it has improved no end. It's a much more vibrant, much more animated place than it was. All you have to do is come here at the weekend and see Saturdays and Sundays - the place is heaving.' (no. 20, Blackrock Business Association)

'I would say that when I started on the Main Street, it was about 10 years ago, it was incredibly quiet. You know it was difficult, but having said that anyone who came in usually bought something because they came specially, you know they weren't just wandering around, it was mainly people

with purpose. And now because of a lot of coffee shops it's a different place altogether. It definitely feels busier....it's definitely improved a lot.' (no. 13, established specialty retail)

'My view is it's significantly better. When we first moved to Blackrock, which would have been in 2012-2013, there were lots of empty shops....There were, you know, just lots of empty shops and now it's vibrant....So there is the odd shop that's shut down. But even the ones that do shut tend to be refilled.' (no. 21, established professional services)

A number of businesses brought **'footfall'** up for discussion in the interviews, with more established traders noting the difference between before and after the Covid Works, and with new traders acknowledging that footfall is good, especially at weekends:

'I think there have been massive improvements regarding footfall and presence on the street, the extra planting and seats as well as coffee shops.' (no. 17, established retail management)

'...it would seem footfall is higher now...there's certainly more people sitting out on the park benches on the Main Street - so that's somewhere to socialise and congregate. So that's definitely noticeable.' (no. 5, established retail services)

'there is great footfall, I like that there is wide footpaths, and it feels safe to walk, you can bring buggies and family here.' (no.2, new/recent specialty retail)

'...there's plenty of footfall on the Main Street....lots of commuters are passing through with the DART being there so you've got a lot of people passing your shop front every day and which is good regardless that we're at the top of the town and not in the centre, people still will pass here...' (no. 6, new/recent hospitality business)

Footfall attracting new Business:

Regarding why a new business chose Blackrock Village as a location, they noted *'I would say just footfall and just the busyness and the activity in the area. And then also it's just a beautiful unit with beautiful views. So those two are the main reasons...Also I do think that Blackrock is really on the up.'* (no. 22, new/recent hospitality business)

From Ghost Town to Buzzing Weekends:

'You come down here on Sundays and it's like Carnaby Street, with all the prams and buggies, and come in and see all the cyclists and people after their runs....in that sense we've become a destination to come to.' (no. 16, established service provider)

'I think at night the village is, and certainly at the weekends is, a lot more lively than it would have been. It was a bit of a ghost town before Covid. People would come in at 8.30 on the dart and they'd leave at 5.30 and that was it. Whereas now it definitely seems to be more lively. And local people are using it more.' (no. 14, established professional services)

'Saturday morning in Blackrock is hopping generally, with people, not necessarily shopping but having coffee. People with the kids after finishing sports and so the dads are outside on the street chatting while the kids are running amok but it's nice. It's lively.' (no. 13, established specialty retail)

'So if you come down here on a Sunday, this place is hopping on a Sunday, especially when there's a little bit of sun.' (no. 15, established specialty retail)

Figure 6 Weekend street vitality in Blackrock Main Street (April 2024)



Calling out the Impact of the Covid Mobility Works specifically:

[The street layout changes since Covid have] 'positively, definitely positively [impacted upon our business]. People walk through the village. They come out of the car-parks...I think making the street one-way has brought people by foot in...It's probably helped trade, to be honest with you, because it's brought people in on foot.' (no. 3, established specialty retail)

'...when good weather is here, people are out and about and they're on the streets...But definitely the weekends, you'd see a great buzz around the village and that's only since Covid. I think, you know, the introduction of the planters and additional seating down the Main Street obviously helps. So it creates a little bit of a hub in the centre of the town, which is nice'. (no. 6, new/recent hospitality business)

[The greatest impact from the Covid street changes are] 'the footfall. I think that obviously having the outdoor sitting areas, the wider footpaths has brought about greater footfall to the village...When I took over [the business] in 2017...at lunchtime Saturday, the village was quiet, whereas now, particularly...if you find a bit of good weather, the place is packed you know, so it's great, so definitely I think it's certainly going in the right direction.' (no. 9, established service provider)

[The Covid works] 'increased our trade, especially on sunny days. We never realised we had an outdoor area until Covid came along.' (no. 1, established hospitality business)

'Certainly during Covid, a lot of restaurants benefited, people shopped locally so there was a huge increase in footfall.' (no.17, established retail management)

'the fact that you now have people on the street as opposed to just it being a through way for cars. If you have footfall on the street, you actually have bodies on the street. They're going to shop, because people want to shop...And if somewhere nice appeals to them, they're going to spend the

money. So it's basically putting more people on the street because the street is more attractive. That has made the difference.' (no. 20, Blackrock Business Association)

Two hospitality businesses, however, feel like footfall is down. One business who feels that *'footfall isn't there anymore'* (no. 19), largely blames it on the one-way system and reducing the convenience of the village for those coming by car. Another long established business thinks footfall is down on Blackrock Main Street now compared to years ago, with this business noting the impact of the shopping centres, and the cost-of-living crisis. Other impacts on footfall from the fall-out from Covid-19 are discussed in Section 3.7.

'I think footfall is definitely down, probably because the two shopping centres and big shopping centres that have opened like Dundrum....I think things are so expensive at the minute, people have less disposable income.' (no. 7, established hospitality business)

3.3 Main Street Atmosphere & Village Feel

'...it's much more vibrant as a village...like what a village should be.'

(no. 1, established hospitality business)

It was clear from the interviews that the concept of a 'village' and a Main Street or 'village atmosphere' is important to the business community, and that the Covid Mobility works have a key role to play in re-establishing this feeling in Blackrock through the addition of outdoor social spaces, greenery, reduced car traffic etc. This view was expressed by new and established business alike, across a wider range of sectors.

'It's improved no end... it's the vibrancy. It's the animation of the street, the activity...it's going towards how a village centre, in my opinion, should be. Full of people, socialising, chatting, interacting. And it's not just a through-way for cars and that's I think what we're hoping to achieve and I think that to a large extent has been achieved.' (no.20, Blackrock Business Association)

'I'd say the ambient feel [has had the greatest impact], the ambience in the village. It made it more of a village feel to it....in that before anything [the Covid Mobility Works] happened, I could go out my front, a customer could leave the shop, I could go out the door and I wouldn't see them. The way it is now, somebody could be in the shop, go out and I could go out into the street a half an hour later and I'll still see them around, lingering...it's the ambience as a result of the work that's gone on the Main Street itself.' (no. 4, established retail business)

'...the fact that there's less traffic... and there's a nice atmosphere on the street. Less pollution. And less noise.' (no. 14, established professional services)

'the one-way traffic system southbound and a cycle lane was installed as well, northbound only...and planters etc which I think have added tremendously to the feel of the village and it has removed the rat-run commuter car journeys as well, which have stayed out on the by-pass.... We're

a service business, so footfall and traffic doesn't really affect us hugely. However my experience of it is that it's a more pleasant atmosphere on the Main Street.' (no. 5, established retail services)

'There is a good mix on the street and not many vacancies. The feel of the village is nice. There is never any carry on that makes the village feel threatening. I think it looks well and feels nice.'
(no. 12, established bulky retail)

'...Main Street has changed so much and it's such a nice place for people to be....I've lived here for, jeez, nearly 30 years, and the difference... It's funny, actually, because I found a picture that I'd taken 2017, it was just before Paddy's Day and they just put up bunting on the street, taken right up there, and I just happened to find it almost to the day so I took another picture in exactly the same spot, just wanted to see the difference in it, you know it really is extraordinary.'
(no. 10, established specialty retail)

'Much better. Looks better. The one-way system, I'm happy, I'm delighted with the benches, trees and a bicycle lane. The one-way system maybe has removed some customers of the town, but on the other side, they have all the new cafes that bring people in the place and all the Covid changes have brought life to the cafes. I used to come on Sunday morning to work, this place would be dead around 10 o'clock. Now it's, you come here at 10 o'clock on a Sunday morning, it's coffee wars, there's people everywhere. People sit down in the street, it's great change, it's much more vibrant as a village.' (no. 11, established specialty retail)

'I think it has had a positive impact on the village and the vibe and the feeling about Blackrock.'
(no. 14, established professional services)

The **new businesses** also expressed positive views on the look and feel of the revamped village:

'...since Covid, the works on the Main Street have definitely drawn more people to the area. It's a much more hospitable Main Street...And with the one-way system and the bike lanes and the planters and just like that, that little extra effort. It's very well maintained. And there's good benches and everything which is always positive....it has a nice feel of a...it is a seaside town, but it does have more of that feel to it since the [Covid] developments have been done..'
(no.22, new/recent hospitality business)

'Everyone is very friendly, and {Blackrock Village} it's stylish too.' (no. 2, new/recent specialty retail)

'it's just a gorgeous village.' (no. 8, new/recent hospitality business)

'...when good weather is here, people are out and about and they're on the streets...But definitely the weekends, you'd see a great buzz around the village and that's only since Covid. I think, you know, the introduction of the planters and additional seating down the Main Street obviously helps. So it creates a little bit of a hub in the centre of the town, which is nice'. (no. 6 new/recent hospitality business)

Several **established businesses also** expressed their general satisfaction with the Covid Mobility works in the Main Street:

'I think it's greatly improved.' (no. 15, established specialty retail)

'there's a huge improvement over the years, especially post-Covid. They've actually done a great job'. (no.1, established hospitality business)

'The Main Street has worked.' (no. 17, established retail management)

'Delighted that they did the enhancement.' (no. 12, established bulky retail)

One business manager noted that *'I've worked at a number of different places. So I suppose with here, there seems to be a strong sense of community and togetherness'* (no. 18, established retail). One business, however, feels that post-Covid, the village has changed for the worse, and made a very hard trading situation due to Covid even more difficult:

'But there's no village atmosphere here anymore. Everyone's out for themselves.....Covid decimated our trade...and on top of that, we had everything changed from the village.' (no. 19, hospitality business)

3.4 Popularity of Outdoor Seating, Planting & Trading Areas

'It increased our trade, especially on sunny days. We never realised we had an outdoor area 'til Covid came along.'

(no. 1, established hospitality business)

The second strongest theme that arose from the business interviews relates to the popularity of the outdoor seating areas, including wooden benches, picnic tables, and planting that was provided as part of the Covid Mobility Works, as well as the space gains that allowed for additional outdoor trading areas. Even if some traders had some complaints about specific elements of the Covid Mobility Works (e.g. the loss of informal/easy deliveries and loading through the one-way system, or the reduction in convenience for car-drivers), there was near universal praise for the addition of the seating areas (wooden benches, tables and picnic benches). As one business pointed out, for a small investment, there is a big return on that investment:

'I think it's all positive and for what's a relatively small investment, you know, I think that's a real return on that investment'. (no. 21, established professional services)

'Seating has had the greatest impact. Its made the village a nice space to be in.' (no. 17, established retail management)

Figure 7 Outdoor seating and extended trading areas of businesses on Blackrock Main Street



'The planters are super, the park benches, there's a little square outside Bank of Ireland and that's super.....they've put out benches outside some of the restaurants and pubs, which is nice. It's extended retailing for those traders.' (no. 5, established retail services)

'People sit down in the street, it's a great change, it's much more vibrant as a village.'
(no. 11, established specialty retail)

There can sometimes be a perception that outdoor seating could attract anti-social behaviour such as people drinking and behaving poorly. A number of businesses noted that the seating is well used by a diverse range of people, and is a big positive for the village, for businesses, as well as for the wellbeing of the community.

'The first thing I would say that's really good is the picnic tables that are dotted around; they encourage people loiter more and it creates more of an atmosphere.....so I do think the atmosphere totally changed since they put out the outdoor seats and tables on the street. And across the street, you get coffee people not just drinkers.' (no. 13, established specialty retail)

'if you come down at 10.30, 11 on a Sunday morning, every single one of these benches is taken up, like literally every single one, with people standing around drinking coffee. There are dogs, there are kids, there's very little traffic, people with bikes. Honestly, it is incredible....it's healthier physically and mentally with people just being out of doors. You've got all of these planters around which are good for both people as well as like bees...just having the green makes such a huge difference....in the evening, they'd have tables and chairs outside for people eating....And it is really lovely feeling part and very connected to the community. And I mean, that is one of the four or five keystones for a happy life, being connected to community is one of the top things and having those interpersonal connections, that you're physically sitting talking to a person.' (no. 10, established specialty retail)

'I think there have been massive improvements regarding footfall and presence on the street, the extra planting and seats as well as coffee shops. It very evident people re coming to the village or meeting outside Hatch or Insomnia with a view to sitting outside.' (no. 17, established retail management)

A business that previously never considered the potential of outdoor trading areas stated, *'we do appreciate our outside area now, more than we ever did.'* (no.1, established hospitality business)

A new business that opened also recognized the potential of the outdoors for business growth. *'We're very happy and we want to expand. The only place we can expand is outwards'* (no. 8, new/recent hospitality business).

One business noted however that they felt that some of the side streets adjacent to the Main Street did not get their fair share of seating, and felt somewhat forgotten about:

'I think there should be more public seating. I do like that they put in some of that, but it was very sporadic where they put it...It's like they concentrate on the Main Street and forget all the side streets and we're paying the same rent and the same rates as everybody else, you know what I mean? it's like you're always forgotten about.' (no. 19, hospitality business)

3.5 Active, Engaged & Supportive Business Community

'I think the atmosphere between businesses - it's quite a good community and communication between businesses are good.'

(no. 7, established hospitality business)

One of the strongest themes that arose from the interviews is the feeling among the business community that they are part of a supportive and welcoming business environment. New businesses particularly noted the welcoming nature of fellow businesses in the village, with a special mention for the Blackrock Business Association (BBA):

"Everyone's been so friendly....everybody's been really supportive. [Our manager} was at the Blackrock [Business Association] meeting there last week. He said it felt as if he was there for years, you know, everyone just welcomed everyone in.' (no. 8, new/recent hospitality business)

'My experience has been very positive [of Blackrock as a location to do business so far]. Local businesses are very welcoming. It feels that things are very well organised and the Business Association is very helpful.' (no. 2, new/recent specialty retail)

'We've also got such a warm welcome from the traders...all of the retailers have been so supportive and so welcoming.' (no.22, new/recent hospitality business)

More established businesses also talk about the supportive business environment and the active and engaged business network:

'There is a really good sense of business community, we look after each other...I think it has become more like this after Covid. I think we all stick together and help each other. Everyone knows each other and its great.' (no. 15, established specialty retail)

'I think the momentum brought by Tom¹¹ and the [BBA] team is superb and we're all glad and grateful for the effort and time he's put into it over the years.' (no. 5, established retail services)

'the Business Association are always doing things so it's a benefit to be a member.' (no. 12, established bulky retail)

'I'm a member of the BBA so that is very active. Its actually good for me as I am a sole trader, it helps me to know what is happening, otherwise you might not know. I do think generally we all look out for each other. And there is a WhatsApp group for security.' (no. 13, established specialty retail)

There is also a sense that this may encourage some businesses to be also active in the community and push business development:

'...I work very closely with the Blackrock Business Network and Tom Feeney....I will be leading up a hospitality committee and talking about a Rock festival....I just found that we had a very successful [St.] Patrick's weekend from a family oriented Blackrock....I look at Dalkey, I look at Greystones, I'm looking at lobster festivals, I'm looking at vintage car festivals and all this stuff is bringing footfall. So essentially what I'm saying is when footfall comes into the town, we benefit.' (no. 6, new/ recent hospitality business)

'I cut all the hedges [in the planter boxes] because the Council won't do it...if everyone did a little bit....the BBA work very hard especially when they do up the Leprechaun Chase, involved in Blooms Day, they're all involved, trying to get the community involved in lots of things. They are doing really good work.' (no. 15, established specialty retail)

'it is such a well maintained and clean little town and all the retailers do put a little bit of effort into that....I'll always have our staff outside sweeping or doing like any litter outside our premises.' (no.22, new/recent hospitality business)

However, there is a sense too that there is a considerable workload associated with running an effective business association, and converting this into financial support through business subscriptions is not necessarily a straightforward task:

'I would say pretty well, but it could be better....it's 70 out of 240, 250 [businesses within the wider village area that pay the BBA subscription], so roughly just over a quarter.'

¹¹ Referring to Tom Feeney, the Chair of the Blackrock Business Association

The Business Association particularly emphasise the need for a programme of events to maintain and grow Blackrock as a destination:

'particularly a village like Blackrock, needs a few standout events during the year to give the whole town a sort of a character...we have the Santa comes at Christmas, we have a Bloomsday event, and then we have the Leprechaun Chase and St. Patrick's Day Festival...I think it's something that people look forward to, it gives the village an identity, and it means we're not just an anonymous village, we have something that we can hang our hat on. And I would be looking to add another one now, the Rockfest towards the end of the year...'

The BBA also noted that the St. Patrick's Day festival was going from 'strength to strength' (see Figure 8) and there is a lot of (unpaid) work involved in organising and managing events - 'it's a 25 hour a week job [on the BBA].'

Figure 8 Images from the St. Patrick's Day Festival 'The Leprechaun Chase' in Blackrock (2023, left; 2024 – right)



Engaging stakeholders in design concepts and planning proposals for further development of an area can sometimes be difficult. The importance of personal communication with local businesses (as well as the wider community) by the Business Association is noted as a key way to ensure businesses are actively engaged with the process of street design (both the temporary Covid Mobility Works and the permanent 'Living Streets Blackrock' plans):

'How are [the local businesses] engaging with the changes to the street and what's happening? I think very engaged. I think they are probably very aware of what's going on because we've gone to a lot of trouble to brief them initially on what we were doing because I think that's how we got 'Living Streets 1' working so well. We initially emailed everybody, told them what was going on, sent them drawings, sent them photographs of what was likely to happen and then we visited everybody personally as much as we could and asked if they had any difficulties or any questions.... I do a newsletter once a month that goes out to all the businesses and a lot of the community as well. It goes out to 1,020 people in total with an opening rate of 70% which is very high for a newsletter. ' (no. 20, Blackrock Business Association)

The BBA pointed the interviewer to their business and community newsletters which as well as being emailed out to their mailing list, they are also available on the Blackrock Business Association's website www.blackrock.ie/news/. Extracts from the newsletters are provided in the Appendix for information. A

key feature of these newsletters is the positive communication style utilised. A notable feature of the Blackrock Covid Mobility Works is that they were actively sought by the Blackrock Business Network (as they were known at the time), in conjunction with a number of members of the local community (especially BVRAG¹²), Elected Representatives and others, to help the traders of the Main Street and adjacent streets through the very difficult trading conditions of the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic¹³.

3.6 Blackrock 'On-the-Up': A Destination Again

'It's made Blackrock a destination area.'

(no.1, established hospitality business)

One of the important themes arising from the interviews is the number of businesses that feel Blackrock has been re-established as a 'destination' in people's minds again, and that it is now 'on-the-up' after a number of years in decline. Businesses both noted that people are coming to Blackrock 'again' and new businesses are now attracted to the area. A particularly interesting point that arose is that even a number of non-footfall oriented businesses felt that they too had benefited in a more indirect way as the 'profile' of Blackrock has improved.

'I think Blackrock is nearly like a destination for people.' (no.3, established specialty retail)

'I think Blackrock was viewed as a suburb that had thrived years ago but since Covid had certainly taken a turn - turned a corner and was starting to become more 'up and coming'. There had been a lot of new businesses over the last couple of years opening in Blackrock....there was almost a 'new scene' being created [in Blackrock].' (no. 6, new/recent hospitality business)

'Before Blackrock was more of a ghost town especially during the week. I think a lot of the shops have upgraded. The Village is looking more groomed, vibrant, and it has a choice of restaurants and pubs with seating outside, with shared seating as well.' (no. 17, established retail management)

'We're not retailing. However, footfall does, there's some impact from that in terms of profile....Blackrock experienced a huge jump in footfall in the pandemic...and with the shift to hybrid working. It's a massive jump.' (no. 5, established retail services)

'So it's a lot more cosmopolitan now than it used to be. I would say upmarket. It used to be a bit down and dirty but also quite funky in the 90s, for probably the mid-to-late 90s on, it seemed to be going downhill. And then, thanks be to God, somebody decided they needed to do something about it. And I guess in the last five years, perhaps, we've seen a concerted effort to try and bring it back

¹² BVRAG is described as 'a small focussed action group that works in partnership with key Blackrock Village stakeholders' with an objective 'to help ensure the rejuvenation of Blackrock Village through coherent planning and investment in the public realm, for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations of Blackrock residents, businesses and visitors (<https://blackrock.ie/bvrage/#bvrage>).

¹³ Further information and context is provided in the June 2021 Report 'Evaluation and Review of the Phase 1 Covid-19 Mobility and Public Realm Works undertaken by Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council – Interim Findings'.

up again...I think it's made Blackrock more attractive and certainly for people coming in to Dublin from maybe abroad to take up jobs here, I think they would have a much more positive view of Blackrock than they would have if they'd come here five years ago.' (no. 14, established professional services)

A number of businesses, including some long established traders, also specifically noted that Blackrock had been known in the past (1980s/1990s) as somewhat of a music and nightlife destination, then went through a period of decline, and since the pandemic has become a destination again – this time largely centered around coffee, food and leisure.

'Covid changed everything. And we turned into a coffee hub....We became a destination....in that sense we've become a destination to come to. It's buzzy, it's trendy, and there's a variety there...it is attracting now, where you have 20 bikes all parked up getting their coffees, it is becoming a destination to come to.' (no. 1, established hospitality business)

'We've gone through dips and lows [in Blackrock Village over the decades], but we're back now on a high, it's on a different bubble'. (no. 16, established service provider)

'But what it has done is people have been talking about Blackrock. So us being based in Blackrock, people know where Blackrock is now. There's been a lot of talk in the media about what it's done. So it's made Blackrock more well-known for being a village...' (no. 21, established professional services)

'I just think Blackrock has been on- the-up recently and there's great footfall just on that corner with the DART and just around the corner....if you think about it 10 to 12 years ago, there wasn't a whole lot [in Blackrock Village]....now you've got a couple of really great restaurants - Big Mikes, Daata and Little Forest - and The Blackrock [pub] has just opened and we've another amazing coffee shop across the road there....there's lots going on and I really believe in the area.' (no.22, new/recent hospitality business)

'Everyone's here for...it's more on the Main Street here because of all the coffee shops. And Hatch has a huge following...This one is hopping. They're a huge draw for Blackrock. And then of course the Blackrock Market as well with all the restaurants in there, that's a huge draw for us as well...So Blackrock has really come up with the type of food you can eat.' (no. 15, established specialty retail)

Diversity of Offer & Magnet Businesses bringing Wider Benefits:

'it doesn't matter what's attracting the people once there's more people, so everybody benefits from that.'

(no. 1, established hospitality business)

In addition to the town profile being improved since the Covid Mobility works, a number of businesses specifically noted that the magnet style businesses that tend to draw people into Blackrock (most particularly coffee and food), also benefit other types of business as general footfall and exposure has increased. Many businesses also expressed a view that there is a wide variety of business offering around

the Main Street, and one of the new businesses also pointed out the wider amenity and community facilities that contribute to the feeling of a 'balanced' village.

'We've got more restaurants and coffee shops in Blackrock [since Covid] which helps. And you come down here on a Sunday morning there's lots of people here and it doesn't matter what's attracting the people once there's more people, so everybody benefits from that.' (no.1, established hospitality business)

'And [the Blackrock traders] have all been very happy to see our new little addition to the village because, you know we could be seen as a competitor...I feel and what I've seen in the past working and running different restaurants around the place, like you can say 'Oh, this new restaurant and this new cafe is a competitor and it's bad news'. But I'm of the belief that the more that's in the area, the better it is for everyone. And you can really benefit off people - like, people might come to us for a glass of wine before they go to dinner at Big Mike's and then come to us for a glass of wine after dinner, that kind of thing. So I think the more is in the area, the better it is really for everyone.' (no. 22, new/recent hospitality business)

'I think the other thing that has helped though is other new businesses coming in. I know we have plenty of coffee shops, but they're all doing very well and they obviously drive their own footfall etc. In that regard and really for us I think the more people that are in the village, the more exposure our business gets because [we have an] attractive fit-out, so people look and say 'Oh what's that?'. (no. 9, established service provider)

'..the style of business has maybe changed a bit in that the whole hospitality business by way of coffee shops, cafés, that type of thing, that's gone up no end. I think businesses that feed off the increased animation and increased footfall on the street have also improved...And that all comes from just more people on the street sitting out having coffee and they decide to wander across the street and have a look at the shop.' (no.20, Blackrock Business Association)

'I think Blackrock Main Street has everything, it's a great location, close to the sea, easy access, business on Main Street. Everyone is very friendly, and its stylish too...There are a diverse range of businesses and nice coffee shops, it feels balanced....there are so many places, nice cafés, sitting down, and there's a lovely library up the road, and then there's the sea. So it's very balanced.' (no. 2, new/recent specialty retail)

'Blackrock....it has a little bit of everything.' (no.3, established specialty retail business)

3.7 Business Health, Macro-Economics & Post-Covid Societal Change

'I'm very happy with how everything's going operationally and business wise and given it's such a difficult time for the [hospitality] industry.'

(no.22, new/recent hospitality business)

The Covid-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on many businesses (and society), both in Ireland and internationally. Many businesses did not survive the dramatic changes in trading conditions including a number of 'lock-downs' where only what were considered 'essential businesses' were allowed to freely trade, 'outdoor only eating' orders impacting pubs, restaurants, cafes etc., and 'stay at home' and 'work-from-home where possible' orders. It wasn't until February 2022 that most restrictions were finally removed. The 'work-from-home where possible' orders had, and are still having, a significant impact on Blackrock Village as there are a number of offices located there including some large employers such as Zurich Insurance Ireland. Those businesses that did survive were then hit with difficult macro-economic conditions (such as the cost-of-living and energy crisis, staff shortages etc.) and wider geopolitical factors (such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine). Despite this, many of the businesses of Blackrock Village have an optimistic outlook and are able to separate out the macro-economic conditions impacting business from more local conditions.

New Businesses:

A number of new businesses opened up along the Main Street and adjacent streets during 2024. The businesses interviewed expressed optimism and satisfaction with where their businesses are at health wise.

'I'm very happy with how everything's going operationally and business wise and given it's such a difficult time for the [hospitality] industry. So we are grateful to our customers. We're so lucky to have a busy café that can sustain itself.' *(no.22, new/recent hospitality business)*

'We're further on [turnover wise] than we expected to be... We're very happy and we want to expand. The only place we can expand is outwards.' *(no. 8, new/recent hospitality business)*

'I'm still adjusting, I'm busy. It's coming into the summer, so everyone is out and walking. Weekends are busier than weekdays....Towards the weekends it's always busier than the weekdays. But I suppose that's normal - everybody, all the business here.' *(no. 2, new/recent specialty retail)*

Established Businesses:

A number of established businesses, despite the difficult macro-economic conditions, saw the business development opportunities that came with the Covid Mobility Works:

'turnover has slightly gone up. We're taking our business in a different direction.... it increased our trade, especially on sunny days. We never realised we had an outdoor area 'til Covid came along.... We'd be definitely using more employees during the summer months where it was generally a quiet time. But now on sunny days, we definitely need more staff on.' (no.1, established hospitality business)

Another establisher specialty retailer (no.3) noted that the Covid Mobility Works have been helpful as it brought more footfall, *'It's probably helped trade, to be honest with you, because it's brought people in on foot.'*

Impact of Remote Working & Macro-Economic Conditions:

Another business that opened since the pandemic, acknowledged the impact of many office workers still working from home especially on Mondays and Fridays¹⁴, even if this trend has started to reduce in recent months¹⁵.

'Mondays and Fridays will be the two days, believe it or not, that can be actually quieter lunch days for us, because you've got a lot of people, even though the offices are quite populated and that's increasing, a lot of people are still working from home.' (no. 6, new/recent hospitality business)

The issue of the reduction in office workers was brought up by other established businesses that remembers the time pre-pandemic when there were many office workers frequenting the Main Street, and the loss of their presence is hard for business. The established retail business (no.4) below states that despite these losses, the Covid Mobility Works *'would have helped'* and that they *'might have been in a worse state without the changes'* but also notes that *'I've no definite proof of anything.'*

'Since Covid actually has been the biggest change in a sense that we lost a huge number of office staff gone from the locale, not coming into the village in the morning time to work and those living in the village not going to work in town, going down to the DART station.'

'Definitely the lack of office people in the area has had its own effect but it's been balanced in a sense by the students in the BFEI college up the way and also by the builders who are working on the old Europa site - so where we had lost a lot of office staff we had covered us, balanced us off against with builders who were coming in anything up to three times a day.'

'Weekends have changed in a sense that the pub trade isn't what it was and with Covid the new social outlet for the general public in a sense was actually all the coffee shops and they were definitely, they were the ones who really did well during Covid. Both them and the pharmacies, I always thought. We did alright...'

The Blackrock Business Association also noted the negative effect of remote working, *'the negative one would be working from home definitely has had an effect....'*, especially on businesses that relied on their

¹⁴ For example, the Western's Development Commissions 2023 national survey of remote working in Ireland showed that only 3% of those surveyed were working fully on-site, and that the most popular on-site days are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursdays (for more information see [2023 Remote Working in Ireland Survey - Western Development Commission](#))

¹⁵ For example, see [Tensions on the rise over the return to the office](#) and [What will 2025 mean for remote working?](#)

lunch trade, and noted that two hospitality businesses were not able to survive the most recent economic conditions, especially when combined with the other issues of staff shortages, increasing costs of doing business and *'margins just not high enough to make ends meet'*. Low margins in the hospitality sector is a well documented issue currently¹⁶.

Another long established business owner articulated the significant impact of Covid on people's habits, including remote working, and how this has impacted the hairdressing sector in particular when combined with the cost-of-living crisis:

'But Covid changed everything, peoples' habits changed.... You've 50% of staff still working from home. We have clients coming in having their hair done more regularly during the week rather than at the weekend...it's spread out. The late nights are affected because the offices aren't functioning. They're doing two, three days a week, so there's nobody around....All the coffee shops close at four o'clock, so there's no activity [at night]....peoples' habits have changed, how they function.'

'Everything we use is electricity. From boiling a kettle to putting on a hairdryer. Our costs have gone through the roof....and staff is an expensive commodity.'

Speaking of the particular challenges the hairdressing industry faced during Covid and the associated lockdowns that some hairdressers are *'still doing the house calls'*, which is hard for a bricks and mortar business to compete with price wise. *'So we're trying to get people back in for the experience, because that's what they missed.'*

'People's habits have changed is the biggest thing. And the cost, everything is very expensive....The big thing is overheads which are much higher with electricity, wages...' (no. 16, established service provider)

Another established business noted the on-going and unpredictable effect of the pandemic on trade, especially the changes in office staff numbers working on-site, still to this day, but concluded that *'comparing it to our 2019 figures, and so definitely business is better over the four or five years'*.

'I suspect I'm no different to any other business in that since February 2020, business has followed no discernible pattern in the sense of predictability. As I mentioned with regard to businesses shifting, we have definitely, definitely noticed a change in that. I would have had at lunchtime people from the offices coming in sometimes just to get their 10 minute break, maybe two or three times a week, they might not buy anything. We don't have that anymore....Our weekends have gotten a lot more busy. Sunday now, per hour is probably our busiest day of the week, which is wild. Yeah, which is great. I work Sundays, so I've always enjoyed it. People are at a different level of browsing and communication and interaction. It's a different vibe to the Monday to Friday, which is nice. So yeah, weekends are definitely busier, And it's hard to know how that balances out with the loss of the during the week Monday to Friday customers.'

¹⁶ For example, see [Closed for business: How the hospitality sector is being wrecked by the perfect storm](#) and [612 food-led hospitality businesses close since VAT hike](#)

'this is still, in business terms, relatively soon after the pandemic. And there is still that shifting balance of figuring out working from home versus working from the office..... It's still definitely a work in progress'.

'certainly in comparison to before the pandemic, yes, we have, we have more staff hours, without doubt....it's hard to kind of gauge, because obviously, it was two to three years ago, business being all over the place but one of the things I've been doing is kind of comparing it to like our 2019 figures and so definitely business is better over the four or five years. More staff, more footfall.'
(no. 10, established specialty retail)

Another business noted that although they feel they have lost some exposure due to reduced passing vehicular traffic, they have gained new exposure from families coming for the coffee shops:

'The turnover has been static, not up or down. Overall traffic coming through has decreased which from the point of view of visibility is a negative. But families come down here more with the coffee shops. We might get people that don't normally come.' (no. 12, established bulky retail)

Three businesses noted that trade/turnover is down, one of whom attributed this to the wider cost-of living crisis as *'things are so expensive at the minute, people have less disposable income'* (no. 7, established hospitality business); another to the reconfigured street with the Covid Mobility Works which they contend that *'midweek [trade] was killed by the one-way system'* (no. 19, hospitality business); and another (specialty retailer) to the changing habits of consumers and the role of supermarkets as competitors.

Continued Business Development:

Another business also saw the business development opportunities that the redesigned Main Street brings. Speaking of the plans for the further development of the Main Street, the business said despite a possible loss of some car-parking, *'I see the atmosphere there on a Saturday and a Sunday - when the sun shines, and people bring people, you know, and that brings opportunity as well.'* This sense of opportunity has led this business manager to want to further be involved in business development in the village:

'...I work very closely with the Blackrock Business Network....I will be leading up a hospitality committee and talking about a Rock festival....I just found that we had a very successful [St.] Patrick's weekend from a family oriented Blackrock....I look at Dalkey, I look at Greystones, I'm looking at lobster festivals, I'm looking at vintage car festivals and all this stuff is bringing footfall. So essentially what I'm saying is when footfall comes into the town, we benefit.'
(no. 6, new/recent hospitality business)

The sense of a village improving, and then encouraging further community entrepreneurship and business development is expressed by another business which states:

'I think the more the village develops, the more I personally want to be involved [in additional, as well as indirect business development], and the more therefore our business will be involved. So it continues to attract and retain us as business owners in the village and its activity.' (no. 21, established professional services)

3.8 Traffic, Car-Parking Management & Loading/Deliveries

One-Way System:

The conversion of the two-way Main Street to a one-way system for vehicular traffic has facilitated the additional public space and outdoor trading gains that is very popular with the businesses (through the reallocation of road-space). It has also substantially reduced the volume and speed of unnecessary through-traffic passing through the Main Street, which is seen as a good thing by many of the businesses.

'Slowing down the traffic, going one-way has helped...the traffic going one-way is a good idea. Cycle lanes - good idea. Paths widened - good idea.' (no. 1, established hospitality business)

'the one-way traffic system southbound....has removed the rat-run commuter car journeys...which have stayed out on the by-pass.' (no.5, established retail services)

[Some of the biggest impacts from the Covid Works are] 'I think it's just the traffic calming, and the benches and the flowerpots, and sort of more seating, public seating.' (no. 14, established professional services)

Figure 9 Image showing one-way system for vehicles and contraflow bicycle lane on Blackrock Main Street



Getting that balance right between increased public space and passing vehicular traffic and potential business exposure was raised by one of the businesses, with the sense that right balance has been achieved in Blackrock:

'in a lot of respects I'm very much in favour [of more pedestrianisation], but having a small amount of traffic coming through does mean that you get perhaps people passing through that would not be familiar with what's in Blackrock otherwise. The noise reduction is fabulous. It's so much quieter now with less traffic, which is brilliant.' (no. 10, established specialty retail)

However, one on-street businesses did express a strong dislike of the one-way system, mainly due to the loss of convenience for car-drivers.

'I think taking away the parking for the one-way system, making it one-way, it got rid of the sporadic trade that would come in....You can't jump in their car, park, run out, get their few bits....There was no easy way to zip in and out of the village like there was before. There was no convenience to the village anymore. It's a chore for people to move....we're no longer a stopping town...' (no. 19, hospitality business)

A business also described the one-way as 'less convenient for my shoppers' if they are 'coming by car' (no. 18). Another on-street business was also unhappy with the one-way, however there was more of a sense with the latter that the bike lane was the crux of the issue and a willingness to accept the one-way vehicular traffic due to the wider benefits for the village (if the bike lane could be converted to extra car-parking as they also had the wider view that Blackrock Main Street has 'greatly improved' since the pandemic). Describing a situation where traffic was trapped for a duration due to a broken down bus the retailer noted:

'So having a one-way system here, it's not great..... I think if they were going to do something and make this a one-way street, they should have made it for parking... instead of a cycle track there's no need for a cycle track in my opinion because you're not even on your bike for long here....It's probably about 40 seconds....I've nearly been hit a few times by people flying past on bikes because they do come pretty fast down there.' (no. 15, established specialty retail)

Deliveries:

The main everyday impact of the one-way vehicular system is on the changes made to the conditions for deliveries and loading. Previously the two-way road system, with excess road space in certain sections, facilitated loading and deliveries in an informal (and sometimes illegal, and unsafe) way. Although this sometimes may not have been safe, such as for other passing drivers, cyclists or pedestrians (such as in the conditions shown in the top image in Figure 10), deliveries were seen as less complicated as some space could usually be found somewhere handy, and sometimes directly adjacent to the relevant shop unit, which may no longer be the case. The reconfigured street layout means that informal deliveries are no longer possible, however a number of dedicated loading bays were implemented as part of the Covid Mobility Works. Enforcement of these bays is sometimes an issue, with customers parking in them. This causes frustration for some of the retailers as the one-way street system coupled with a number of previously existing adjacent one-way streets means that delivery drivers may have to drive around the whole block again, or have to deliver at a distance from the retail unit.

'..Our main problem with the new [street] layout is the delivery. There's no space.....[the existing delivery bays are] always busy. It's not enough [delivery] space.' (no. 11, established specialty retail)

The business above also noted that enforcement of the loading bays was an issue, and argued that there are also spill-over loading issues from the adjacent shopping centre who use the Main Street (rather than the shopping centre grounds) to do much of their loading, but also noted that:

'To be fair, it was only loading until 3 o'clock when first put in and then it was moved back to 4 o'clock which is better....Before the changes in 2020, there was no loading bay, but all the trucks were parking at the top of the road at the entrance to the village....Illegally, you see on the double

yellow lines, but it wouldn't stop the traffic. It was illegal, but it was kind of a working solution. Instead of having an open illegal space, we ended up with two loading bays which are not fit for purpose.'

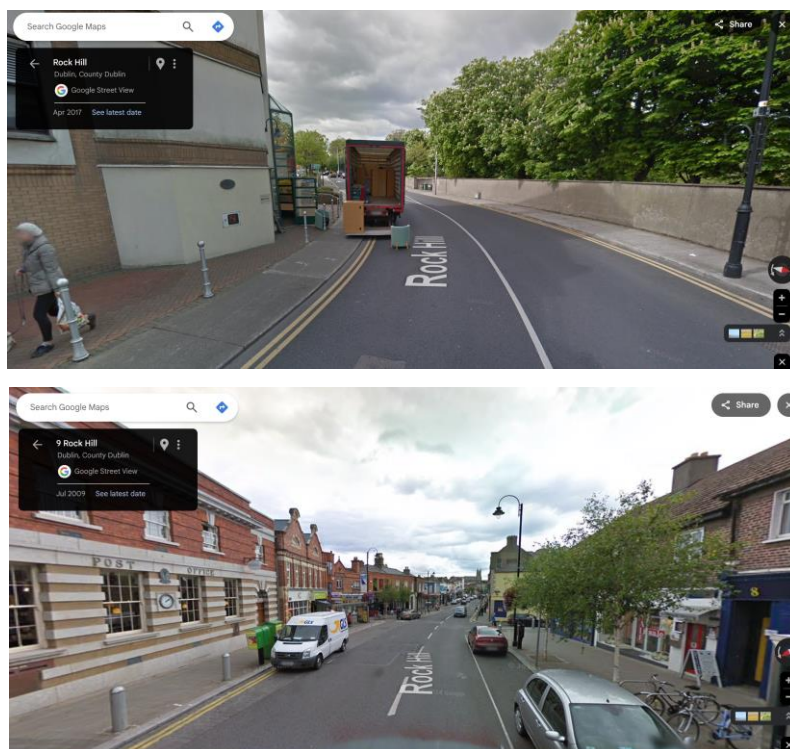
'I can't deliver any of my goods. On Monday I was in [the Cash 'n' Carry]. I came back to Blackrock and I drove three times around the block. ...so I have to carry all the stuff back. It's not convenient that I can't park outside my own door anymore..... You're suddenly going to be at the lights, and you suddenly realise you're going to have to drive the whole block to get back into Blackrock again.'

(no. 16, established service provider)

'And if they want this road to be one-way and keep it one-way, it should be for parking. There's a little problem as well - these are loading bays here. And people are parking in the loading bay. They have nowhere else to park. They have nowhere else to go.... businesses have problems with trying to get their trucks in. Our drivers have to park at the very, very top....And there's always arguments on this loading bay as well.'

(no. 15, established specialty retail)

Figure 10 Pre the Covid Mobility works, deliveries/loading on Blackrock Main Street often took place informally, and sometimes representing a road safety hazard (images sourced from Google Street View).



Another business had issues with the deliveries and people illegally parking in the loading bay and the need for appropriate time management and enforcement, but didn't specifically relate it to the one-way street system:

'..problem is difficulty trying to get deliveries because people parking in the loading bay, when of course they shouldn't be....I'd say 95% of deliveries are done by lunch time. Afternoons are more flexible but until 2pm, parking in the loading [bay] should be prohibited. After 2pm maybe it can be

more flexible. If customers are picking up big items, it is better to come after 2pm...Many people sit in their car while someone gets coffee, and its not being enforced.'
(no. 12, established bulky retail)

A couple of businesses were keen to point out that the only real downside to the Covid Mobility works was regarding deliveries:

'I'd say the only people that don't like the one-way system are the delivery guys, like it's difficult on those. They can't park or pull in, there's very few loading bays.' (no.3, established specialty retail)

'The only thing for us is deliveries, dropping in and off. There's only one loading bay over there, which is always full. So we have a bit of an issue with guys dropping in stock etc. They're always a bit stressed by the time they get here because they don't know where to park the van. That would be the only thing I think.' (no. 9, established service provider)

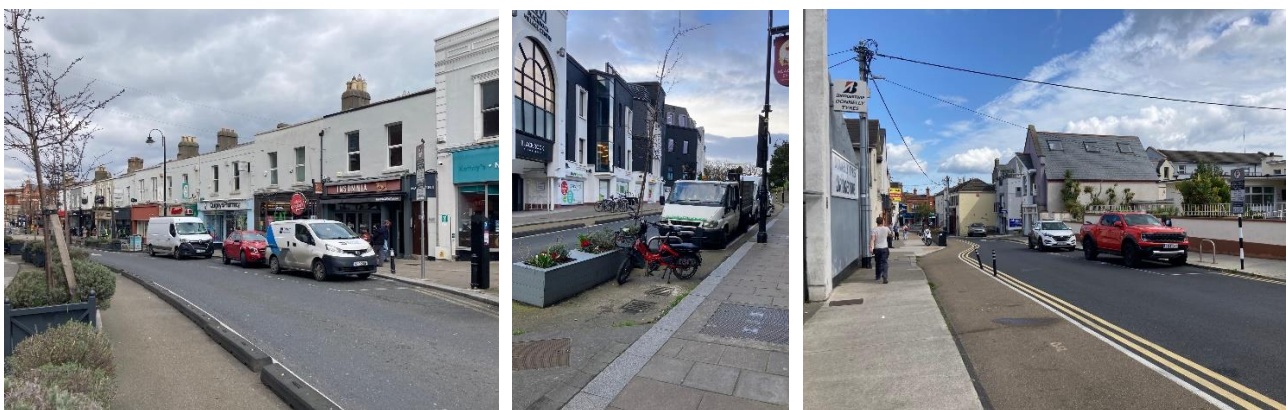
Not all businesses had an issue with the loading and deliveries, and one business noted that they now do local deliveries via cargo bike:

'our delivery guys are OK... And I haven't had any of them complaining. They all seem to be fine.'
(no. 10, established specialty retail)

'Deliveries are early here in Blackrock for this particular venue....it keeps the trucks off the Main Street. They're gone before people wake up.' (no. 1, established hospitality business)

'I bought a cargo bike to do local deliveries as well.' (no. 11, established specialty retail)

Figure 11 There are two loading bays on the Main Street which convert to car-parking areas after 4pm (left and middle image), and there are loading areas on adjacent streets (such as George's Avenue – right image).



3.9 Bicycle Infrastructure & Main Street Environments

'The black defender kerbs, that's been a disaster. Every week, there's people falling.'

(No. 16, established service provider)

Cycling and bike related infrastructure arose as a reasonably strong theme from the interviews, with both positive and some negative views expressed. This was also within the context that a considerable majority viewed the Covid Works as a positive overall, even if there were certain aspects that they didn't like. The crux of the negative issues are primarily centered around the black rubber 'defender kerbs' which were put in place to provide segregation and safety between the contraflow cycle lane and the one-way vehicular carriageway (see Figure 12). As a temporary piece of infrastructure that were readily available at short notice during the pandemic, these were used across Ireland, the UK and in other areas as part of a rapid response to some of the mobility challenges associated with Covid-19. There was little experience in Ireland of these being used before, especially within a Main Street context, where criss-crossing the street by pedestrians and shoppers is a common behaviour trait (and in many ways important for easy access to businesses and social opportunities). The central issue raised is that the rubber kerbs are considered a tripping hazard, as many people do not see them when they are crossing from one side of the Main Street to the other (as people's gaze would typically be focused on ensuring their personal safety from on-coming traffic). This same issue was also found in the Covid Mobility evaluative research of Dundrum Main Street by TU Dublin (2024)¹⁷.

Figure 12 Example of black defender kerbs on Main Street which provide segregation to the contraflow cycle lane.



'The one disaster I would say - you know those cycle lane lumpy bits, yes the cycle kerbs - I don't know how many accidents, people tripping over them. I have fallen myself. I got very hurt. If you are carrying something, you don't necessarily see it....So I do think the sooner they get rid of them the better. And the fact that they are the same colour, they merge in....even though I knew it was there I still fell.' (no. 13, established specialty retail)

'There's numerous complaints about the cycle tracks with them black barriers.' (no. 1, established hospitality business)

'...the lane defenders are a big problem.' (no.20, Blackrock Business Association)

¹⁷ For further details on detail, see [TU Dub DLR Covid Mobility Review Ph2b Dundrum 0424 Issue.pdf](#).

'I don't like the black bumper car type thingies out there because I think they are dangerous. I've nearly tripped on them. I've seen elderly people...We've had to provide medical care to elderly people who've come in with their faces bleeding'. (no. 14, established professional services)

One business did question the need for a cycle-lane on the Main Street as there is one close by on the bypass/Frascati Road, and the infrastructure associated with it causes a tripping hazard and reduced car-parking opportunities (see quote below). Another stated that the one-way nature of the cycle-lane was frustrating due to cyclists occupying the carriageway when travelling in the other direction. Another business (hospitality) felt like *'it all was done for the bike'* causing a hinderance for other street users (no.19).

'I love the bicycle track all the way from Sandycove all the way out. In my opinion, for the [Main] Street, I don't think the bicycle track going along here was a good idea.....So why did they do this here when you can just have very easy access there to the Rock Road anyway?.... Some poor lady fell over, broke her nose and her wrist. Some man injured his shoulder...because they're black. Nobody can see them [defender kerbs]. There's been quite a few injuries in Blackrock with elderly people because they can't see them or they go to step over it and they can't see them. So I just take the bicycle track here, just this section here. For me, not good, it just doesn't work....[I'd] like bike track gone, yeah it's the bicycle track that is the bug bearer....I think if they were going to do something and make this a one-way street, they should have made it for parking...instead of a cycle track, there's no need for a cycle track in my opinion.' (no. 15, established specialty retail)

While the businesses noted above did not like the Main Street cycle lane, or the single direction nature of it, a number of others expressed very contrasting views whereby the cycle lanes and cycle parking are seen as a boost for business, especially due to it's proximate connections with the cycle-lanes along the Coastal Mobility Route (CMR – running from Sandycove to nearby Seapoint Avenue) and along Blackrock Park. One new business also stated that the Covid Mobility works including the bike lanes and all the activity that went with them were also part of the attraction of opening a new business in Blackrock.

'I mentioned why the unit was attractive and why I think Blackrock as an area is attractive....But since Covid, the works on the Main Street have definitely drawn more people to the area. It's a much more hospitable Main Street. And with the one-way system and the bike lanes and the planter, and just like that little extra effort.' (no. 22, new/recent hospitality business)

'...I love having the cycle lanes. We see that again at the weekend for people who will have maybe gone for a swim in Seapoint and then will cycle down to us. One of the reasons I think our weekends are better is because we have the cycle racks right outside our [shop]....we have a bit of a captive audience....[The] greatest impact would cycle lanes, but....the one up here was done before the pandemic....that definitely makes a difference in that people end up down here so it's actually coming from Seapoint and all the way down the coast to Sandycove, that bike lane definitely meant people were coming here. It's changed the...vibe in the village.' (no. 10, established specialty retail)

'I think it has changed in a very positive way. I think the bicycle lanes have added a huge amount of people and, you know, into the village on foot, which is brilliant for a lot of the shops around.' (no.3, established specialty retail)

'I love the cycle lanes. I just wish and I know it's challenging and I know there is a plan to join up the cycle path through the village so you can get to the CMR [Coastal Mobility Route] easily because at the moment you can't.' (no. 21, established professional services)

Regarding proposals to widen the footfall and cycle facilities between Deepwell House and Blackrock Dart Station, the interviewee above (no.22) noted:

'...if they could continue like that great work they did in Blackrock Park.....that would be incredibly welcome. It would encourage more cyclists, I suppose, to take that route. And fortunately we are right on that route. So yeah, it would be very welcome and it is quite exciting.'

Another business who also liked the addition of the cycle lanes, 'Cycle lanes - good idea', also made an observation about the need for more careful placement of bike parking areas, so that they don't unnecessarily utilise prime positions on the street where people like to sit in the sun, and to ensure that the street environment considers walkability, especially for older people:

'it's the sunny side of the road we're on, and bicycles don't need the sun, people do....Paths widened [are] a good idea. And if they level out the surfaces, that's also much needed because there's steps, bollards - it's a bit of negotiating crossing the road, for elderly people at the very least.'
(no. 1, established hospitality business)

3.10 Maintenance of Temporary Infrastructure, Future Aspirations & Moving on to Permanent Works

'I think though when you make the street nice, put plants in, it's important to maintain them, maintenance is really important...It needs to be managed and funded.'

(no. 12, established bulky retail)

Management & Maintenance:

The theme of insufficient management and maintenance of the street arose as an issue from a few of the established businesses, whereas one new hospitality business noted the opposite, saying that *'it is such a well maintained and clean little town, and all the retailers do put a little bit of effort into that'* (no. 22). It is over 4 years since the original temporary Covid Mobility Works were installed, thus the temporary nature of much of the Covid Mobility Works was raised as an issue.

'The town looks a little bit tatty...it has to be kept right to sparkle.' (no.1, established hospital business)

'I'm really looking forward to the street being finished properly, because....the way it looks now, it's not good. The provisional furniture have been knocked off. The bollards for the bicycle have been knocked by trucks. I've seen a lot of people falling on the bollards as well. Old people don't see them. It's more dangerous than usual at this stage.' (no. 11, established specialty retail)

'I think though when you make the street nice, put plants in, it's important to maintain them, maintenance is really important. There should be a team to look after the plants, keep furniture in check and painted etc. And all the good things going on behind the scenes should be shared too. It needs to be managed and funded.' (no. 12, established bulky retail)

Construction of Permanent Works:

The permanent scheme, called 'Living Streets Blackrock' was approved by the Elected Members in July 2023, and construction is imminent (at the time of writing). The construction period is likely to cause significant disruption for the businesses on and around Main Street, and will likely impact the smaller more independent businesses more than the larger chains which may be in a greater position to withstand the temporary impacts. Some businesses also made suggestions for mitigation. However, there is a sense that the permanent works needs to happen, and that it will be better for the village in the long run.

'The sooner it becomes a permanent fixture, the better, because the village will look an awful lot better. I know it'll be a years work....And get it done quickly. Well, people want it, you know. I'm convinced they do....We've worked with [the Council] as regards the Main Street and what should happen there I mean we're talking about the types of furniture the types of surface on the roads the footpaths we've talked all about all of that.' (no. 4, established retail business)

'I'm prepared to put up with the works. I know you have to break eggs to make an omelette and once the omelette turns out nice.' (no.1, established hospitality business)

Expressing concern for the length of construction time, noise and dust, a specialty retail trader noted *'The one thing I am bracing myself for is the Main Street. I think its going to be a major disruption for 18 months. The noise and the dust. I like to have my door open. I have experimented on a cold day and had the door closed, but there is no question, hardly anyone comes in.'* (no. 13). Another long established retail business remembers *'...when the re-asphalted the whole town years ago, we definitely had a [reduction] in footfall - went down like 15%. The whole town went.'* (no. 11).

One business recommends that *'...I think there has to be some thought put into where these contractors [park] in terms of minimising the disruption....'* And also made an astute suggestion regarding the importance of maintaining easy accessibility to both sides of the Main Street during construction, based on previous experience of trading under similar circumstances:

'I'm going back on when I've seen works...being done in Dun Laoghaire, and works being done on Grafton Street as well, when they re-cobbled Grafton Street that time...you know, you kind of have to have visibility of both sides of your street because people forget what's there, and I'd often see people going from one shop to the next and stuff like that, and if you don't have that same access to cross over - so regular intervals in between the works so that we have regular crossings - so we keep connecting the two sides. I think if you separate two sides, you're asking for trouble there.' (no. 6, established hospitality business)

Underutilised Seafront:

'I love the proper design for the seafront. If we have a proper seafront, that will fill up the village even more every weekend. I think it will be lovely.'

(no. 11, established specialty retail)

There are clear and strong aspirations by the businesses for a better designed seafront in Blackrock Village. Blackrock Main Street is adjacent to Dublin Bay and links to the seafront via Bath Place, but currently largely turns its back on it. The rail-line running along the coast edge further reinforces the sense of physical and visual disconnection of the Main Street from the sea (see Figure 13). There is a real sense that it is currently an under-utilised space, that could have so much more potential than currently exists.

Figure 13 The Main Street backs onto the seafront and train-line and has little integration with the coast (bottom left image). Seafront land currently used for car-parking and a bus terminus (top image). Abandoned and partially demolished Blackrock Baths (bottom right image)



'...I think it's an excellent idea [to develop the seafront]. I think it would be massively beneficial to the area in general and retailers. I think that...area there - above ground car-park and the bus terminus - could be utilised in a lot better way.....I think it's a great idea. I think it would be a massive success'. (no. 22, new/recent hospitality business)

'the council have their own ideas for the seafront....But we'd like to get something definite on the seafront and as I said, that's on in the background. ...we always felt, and it was one of my pet projects going back 20 years, that the village had turned its back on the sea.' (no. 4, established retail business)

...it's such a lost opportunity that the baths are sitting there, a natural sea tidal bath...and it's just sitting there idle...it's an asset and opportunity because we're competing effectively with the other towns and villages on the coast...and the link to the park as well...' (no. 5, established retail services)

'I think it'd be brilliant [the redevelopment of the seafront]. Yeah, definitely. I think you could have a lovely farmer's market and everything on a Saturday morning around the back. You know, you could really add to the village.' (no.3, established specialty retailer)

Other businesses also specifically expressed the desire for a wider, safer link from the DART station to Blackrock Park (via the rear of Deepwell House). This proposal also has approval to proceed by the

Council¹⁸, but is more complicated as it requires a 'Compulsory Purchase Order' for part of the lands of Deepwell House.

'I wish it would actually happen because it's been going on for as long as I've been in business in Blackrock. In particular, down by the DART station, I would love to see that area developed....there's a lot more people swimming down there now because Seapoint gets so crowded....it would be amazing. But even just to have access for walking down there I think would enhance it greatly.....it would be so nice to have proper seating there.' (no. 10, established specialty retail)

'Love the whole plan of widening that alleyway and making it a sort of plaza into the park...in and around the DART station... I mean you come out, it's not terribly well lit and you enter into a car park andlike a bus depot next to it because it's the terminus of it because the bus stops. That is not very inviting during the day and I think it could be intimidating during the night. If you were to turn right to walk towards Blackrock Park at the moment, you never would. Now, we're aware that there is finally something going to happen on that. I think that's going to be a tremendous difference. Because for now, no one's going to be using the Park in dusk or evening. No one's going to access it from the dart....if you were to come out [of the DART station] and straight away there's a cafe or there's a venue or there's a restaurant where you can hear some music or something.' (no. 21, established professional services)

Some expressed reservations about certain elements of any redeveloped seafront at Blackrock. One was concerned about the cumulative impact of further car-parking losses. Another was worried about the area becoming too commercialised.

'I have objections against [any redevelopment of the seafront] taking more car parking spaces away, because we've limited car space. Outside the library...they're putting in a cycle lane at Seapoint, and I think we're losing 8/10 spaces, which we don't have in Blackrock.' (no. 16, establishes service provider)

'I think the link to the park is a great idea....The seafront redesign is a good idea too but I would prefer something to clear up the area...there are concerns about anti-social behaviour from people arriving by the Dart and drinking. At the moments, its very quiet, the seafront is a lovely amenity to have but would be good to include water testing. I think if it becomes too commercialised, it could ruin it.' (no. 17, established retail management)

¹⁸ For more information, see <https://dlrcoco.citizenspace.com/infrastructure-climate-change/blackrock-dart-to-park-active-travel-scheme/>



4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Discussion & Conclusions

This key aim of this study is to test the following hypothesis through interviews with businesses: *‘that the temporary ‘Covid Mobility’ project in Blackrock Main Street/Village Centre (involving road space reallocation and public realm expansion) has contributed to the regeneration of Blackrock Main St/Village Centre (over time). It has brought about predominantly positive changes and remains popular among the business community.’* It also sought to gain an understanding of the key reasons for the attraction of new business to Blackrock Main Street/Village.

Nineteen Main Street and adjacent street traders, one business association representative, and two other businesses were interviewed for this research over the Summer and Autumn 2024. A wide range of business sectors participated including hospitality (e.g. cafés, restaurants, pubs), a range of retail from specialty, convenience to pharmacy, and services (e.g. hair dressers, estate agents, dental, professional services).

The results of the interviews show that the business community in and around Blackrock Main Street are found to be generally highly supportive of the Covid Mobility and Public Realm Works and their medium term impacts.

In particular, businesses noted:

- the improved impact on **footfall, street vibrancy and vitality** around Blackrock Main Street;
 - an improved sense of **atmosphere, and village feel** to Blackrock Village;
 - a particular appreciation of the **new outdoor seating, greenery and additional trading areas**;
 - an **active and welcoming business community** where business development and building village identity are also fostered; and
 - an overall **positive feeling to the Covid Mobility** works and an overall feeling that ‘it worked’, and the trading conditions through the pandemic would probably have been worse without it.
- Businesses also recognised the impacts of external **wider macro-economic issues** such as the cost-of-living crisis and **post-Covid societal changes**, such as work-from-home, and how the trading environment is still somewhat in a **state of post-pandemic flux**.

There is also a strong sense that:

- Blackrock has been reestablished as a **destination again** after many years in decline, is ‘**on-the-up**’, and is attracting both new types of businesses and customers;
- People/customers are particularly attracted to the Main Street area by certain types of ‘**magnet businesses**’, but many other business types also benefit from this exposure and improved town profile;
- the one-way trafficked street and associated reduced through-traffic is generally a trade-off worth having for the additional footpath, outdoor trading and public spaces, planting and seating areas, but that **loadings/deliveries and access to car-parking areas** must be well thought-through and managed (so that people aren’t driving around frustrated in circles);
- there are more varied views associated with bicycle and related infrastructure, with the economic and social value of being part of a **wider quality cycle network (particularly one with high amenity and leisure value)** being recognised, but with the central issue being with the rubber **black ‘defender’ kerbs and their associated tripping hazard** (making them an inappropriate piece

of infrastructure for a Main Street environment where pedestrian comfort and easy crossing is important);

- businesses would also like to see greater links with Blackrock Park, and would like to see the Main Street integrate with a **more welcoming and attractive seafront area** – there is a feeling that it is currently a wasted opportunity.

A clear conclusion can be drawn from this research (and following on from earlier phases of the Covid Mobility Review study) that **the Covid Mobility works in Blackrock has spurred on the revitalisation and regeneration of Blackrock Main Street**, and has been generally welcomed by the business community. This revitalisation is derived from many factors, and the **positive and integral role of the Blackrock Business Association (formerly Blackrock Business Network) and its leadership cannot be underestimated** in this regard. Other factors that come in to play include that Covid-19 brought the possibility of an outdoor urban life into people's mindsets; and the Main Street was designed in such a way by the Council as to make this possibility enjoyable and comfortable even within a highly difficult pandemic context. Combined with the amenable seaside location, and adjacency to the Coastal Mobility Route cycle-route, Blackrock Main Street has become a 'destination' in peoples' minds again. Walkability, leisure cycling, attractive and sociable outdoor seating and planting, coffee and food are all factors here contributing to the story. And then the importance of regular festivals and events to help maintain and grow that sense of destination in the public's mind. It is an iterative process that requires regular attention.

Blackrock had a number of hospitality businesses at the start of the pandemic that were able to benefit from the additional outdoor trading areas, but it has also attracted a number of new hospitality businesses into the area in recent months (as well as non-hospitality businesses including a florist and a clothes shop). This is within the context of a well-known difficult time for the hospitality industry since the pandemic, and a small number of hospitality businesses in Blackrock did not survive this time. New businesses have since taken over or opened up. The new businesses noted they were attracted to the 'hospitable' and 'stylish' village with good footfall and activity.

The Covid Mobility works showed that for a speedily implemented and small initial investment (i.e. road-space reallocation associated with temporary cycle infrastructure and street furniture etc.), the **returns on investment can be very high**. Although some of this temporary infrastructure has not been without its problems (e.g. the black 'defender kerbs', and maintenance issues), the approach has allowed for the public and the business to experience a reconfigured street that might never have been thought possible before¹⁹.

While the issue of car access did arise in the interviews, it was not one of the central themes that arose – here the increased footfall, vibrancy and vitality of the street, and the attractiveness of the outdoor seating and trading areas were the points at the forefront of most traders' minds. There is generally an **appreciation of the benefits and the balance brought by the conversion of a two-way trafficked roadway to a one-way trafficked roadway and it's associated reduction in through-traffic and traffic volumes**. A key lesson around vehicle access is really one around **managing car-parking and loading/deliveries well so**

¹⁹ For more information on procedures for exempt, temporary and trial works in Ireland, see Department of Transport (2023) 'Guidelines on Traffic Works Procedures: Section 38 of the Road Act (1994)'

that those who arrive by car or van can understand how the one-way system and car-parking/delivery areas work (to reduce the potential for frustrated and agitated traffic searching for parking or loading space); that there is an attractive and barrier-free walking experience to and around the Main Street (including 'park-n-stride'); and that blue-badge parking is well integrated.

The question of segregated cycle infrastructure and its place in a Main Street context is a nuanced one.

What is clear from Main Streets in general is that the **pedestrian experience is key to footfall and economic and social vitality**, and that the principal of pedestrian comfort, priority and barrier-free movement must be very high on the agenda for a Main Street that wishes to thrive. However, there must also be considerable thought given to how people come by all modes including public transport, walking, by car and by bike. Reducing traffic volumes (especially through-traffic) and speed of all modes are key factors to consider here, as the higher the traffic volumes and speeds, the greater the need for segregated cycle infrastructure becomes (as well as the bigger the impact on the pedestrian footfall experience). Although not all traders may agree, it is clear from the interview findings (and from previous phases of the wider study) that **Blackrock has benefited from cycling and cyclists as part of its current regeneration story, most particularly with Blackrock being part of a wider network of amenable coastal cycle infrastructure**. Without the dedicated space provided by the northbound contraflow cycle lane on the Main Street, and the more traffic calmed southbound shared carriageway (and their associated adjacency to the Blackrock Park cycle route and Coastal Mobility Route), these benefits may not have been gained.

Like the greater sense of balance achieved by the road space reallocation, the balance of cycle infrastructure in Blackrock Main Street also seems to work well and be generally accepted by most businesses. Main Streets and their infrastructure should not be designed as spaces aimed at passing through quickly - they are spaces for dwelling and spending time. **The key for all modes is that people are encouraged to use the Main Street at a more leisurely pace, and thoughtful design is central to that.** In Blackrock Main Street, the temporary cycle infrastructure is generally not designed to encourage speed - it is not overly linear in its nature; has a neutral surface colouring; and is surrounded by planting and humanised by social spaces (as is the road-way). However, it is also clear that the particular segregation infrastructure used in this case (the defender kerbs) has clearly caused problems for some people tripping when crossing, and is not the right solution for this type of Main Street environment.

The interviews showed that the **businesses of Blackrock are largely positive in their outlook, and about the future of the village**, despite the wider macro-economic and geo-political issues. A number of new businesses have started up in the village, and vacancy is low. There is a sense that they are striving for their village to continue to grow and develop, and are open to new ideas. This can be seen in many ways including the welcoming nature of established businesses to new businesses; the involvement of businesses in key events and festivals to keep Blackrock 'on the map'; their wish to make a better relationship with the seafront; and also in their desire to see the approved permanent plans for the Main Street and adjacent streets come to fruition. The timely nature of the latter is important now as the temporary works are partially no longer fit for purpose. The businesses recognise that the construction process will be difficult for them, particularly the smaller more independent businesses, thus mitigation and continuous management by the Local Authority, the Blackrock Business Association and others will be very important. Consideration should also be given on ways to further support (e.g. financial) the important work of the Business Association.

It is clear that Covid-19 was a significant disruptor in many ways, but it was not the only one since 2020. The mobility and public realm changes have, in general, been very well received and, as outlined in this study, enhanced the living experience in Blackrock Village and assisted most of the business community. The disruptions to society from Covid-19 have resulted in changes in how and where people work, with many office workers still working from home for at least part of their working week. A lot of office accommodation is located in and around the Blackrock village area and local businesses within the village have noted a reduction of their custom at certain times between Monday and Friday due to this change in working patterns. Covid-19 has also altered some consumer behaviours, with positive and negative outcomes for differing businesses. The cost of living crisis has had an impact upon consumers as well as increasing costs to business - much of which has to be passed on to consumers. That said, the feedback from businesses interviewed for this study are overwhelmingly positive about the changes to Blackrock village. Businesses have commented on the increased footfall and vitality, particularly on weekends, with a number of them also noting increased turnover. The improvements to Blackrock village has, according to most of the businesses interviewed, led to better trading conditions and a view that Blackrock is back and is in a far better place than it was prior to Covid-19.

A clear conclusion can be drawn from this research that **the Covid Mobility works in Blackrock has spurred on the revitalisation and regeneration of Blackrock Main Street**, and this has been largely welcomed by the business community. **This study is significant as it contributes to a knowledge base (that is largely absent in Ireland, but well documented abroad) relating to the role and contribution of road-space reallocation and public realm reclamation in the regeneration of a Main Street/Village Centre.**

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Appendix



Blackrock Park - exciting progress!



There is a lot of exciting progress in the upgrading of Blackrock Park.... and more to come!

Historic Steps Restoration

These works include the complete restoration of the historic steps. This set of steps **connects the kiosk at the top of the hill with the bandstand and main Park area** at the bottom. The steps are a key feature of the Park. As well as a circulation route, they offer a great vantage point over the bandstand and Dublin Bay. The existing steps were made up of a mix of old granite kerbs and precast concrete. All old granite kerbs are to be retained for use elsewhere in the park. The new works include the installation of new, high quality, solid, cut granite treads, plinth details and paving. These works are just coming to a finish with the handrail to be installed in the coming weeks.



Seating & Planting

New seats have recently been installed throughout the entire park at suitable locations. These are **high quality benches fitted with backrests and armrests** with space left for wheelchairs or buggies. Extensive tree, hedge, bulb and herbaceous planting has been undertaken at Phoenix Terrace to strengthen the sense of arrival to the park and to integrate some recent interventions into the setting.



Historic Kiosk



Blackrock Village Thriving!



Blackrock Village is a **hive of activity at the moment!** At weekends, especially when the sun shines, the Village is buzzing, with people of all ages enjoying the atmosphere and socialising on the street. The vibrancy has played its part in attracting a **number of new businesses into the Village.** The latest arrivals are **Oakberry ACAI** and **San Sab** which have opened on Main Street, and **September** which has moved into the old Wooden Spoon premises on Bath Place. The **Optical Shop** has moved across the street on Rock Hill into an impressive new setting,

The changes carried out on the street in 2020 have had a very positive effect on life in the Village. The making permanent of these changes is due to commence later this year and, now that the Part 8 involving Living Streets Dun Laoghaire has been passed, we can expect DLRCoCo to concentrate more effort on the Blackrock project.



Oakberry ACAI



San Sab Thai restaurant and take-away



St Patrick's Day in Blackrock

Great weather, great participation, great enjoyment!



St Patrick's Day brought much colour, activity and merriment to Blackrock Park and Blackrock Village! The day started with the **Stedfast Brass Band** entertaining the 600 children and their families in Blackrock Park and they were joined by the **legendary Mr Podzo** who used his many tricks to enthrall the children and keep them in high spirits! The serious business started at noon, after **Leas Cathaoirleach Eva Dowling** had officially opened the event, when the various races took place and the children got their moment of glory in chasing their favourite Leprechaun! In the afternoon all the entertainment was in the Village with distribution of goody bags, face painting, balloon shaping and magic – all keeping the children suitably entertained! **Music was provided by 4 excellent groups** – Aiteal, Comhaltas Youth, School of Rock House Band and the Blackrock Ukulele Group. Special thanks also to **Blackrock Tidy Towns** for carrying out the post event street clean-up.

A huge thank you to all our sponsors!





Living Streets Blackrock

High-quality permanent design on the way for Blackrock Village!



Living Streets Blackrock is a DLRCoCo public realm improvement project which aims to enhance the attractiveness, liveability, connectivity and economic vibrancy of Blackrock village. Building on the temporary measures implemented during the COVID restrictions of summer 2020 on Blackrock Main Street, **the project is planning to move the village from a temporary layout to a high-quality permanent design.**

What will the Scheme involve?

- **Public Realm Improvements:** Better landscaping, planting and seating throughout the town to create a safe, accessible and attractive environment and to maintain the economic vibrancy of the town.
- **Easier To Cycle:** New finish for existing bike lane in the village. Contra-flow bike lane passing by the library to connect with existing bike lane on Maretimo Villas and Coastal Mobility Route.
- **Improved Walkability and Accessibility:** Accessible urban environment, improved pedestrian crossings, traffic calming, increased footpath widths and quality.
- **Parking Maintained:** Total Village parking spaces, loading bays and disabled parking spaces will remain approximately the same. Some parking spaces to be relocated from Main Street South to Temple Road and Carysfort Avenue.

New Pocket Park for Village Square



The Village Square area was improved and enhanced nearly 10 years ago and this is now going to get a further makeover. The existing Square area is to become a bigger more elegant space and more enclosed to encourage people to come and sit. Some of the slope will be taken out in order to make it a flatter space. There will also be additional tree planting to add to the existing greenery.

Next steps

1. **Part 8 process** – began on 28 April 2023.
2. Wide ranging **information campaign** by DLRCoCo

Public Consultation: May – 10 June 2023 • Online survey • Webinars • Pop-ups