



**AUTISM FRIENDLY
BLARNEY**

**Three Year Town Plan
Submission**

Autism Friendly Blarney

Autism Friendly Blarney is led by a voluntary committee established in November 2023. The committee oversees strategic planning, community engagement, and delivery of the Autism Friendly Town initiative in Blarney.

The committee meets regularly and works with AsIAM, local businesses, community organisations, public services, and local councillors. Decisions are guided by AsIAM's framework and informed by consultation with autistic people and their families in Blarney.

Executive Committee Members

Chairperson: Sinead Hunt

Secretary: Aisling Foley (Interim)

Social Media Officer: Eily Davis

Website Manager: Aisling Foley

Treasurer: Maire O'Sullivan

Autistic Voice: Jessie McSweeney

Local Support Group: The Harmony Hub

General Committee Members:

Mairead Murphy, Niamh Garvey, Karen Mulcahy,
Christina Collins, Karen Halpin, Catherine Hawe



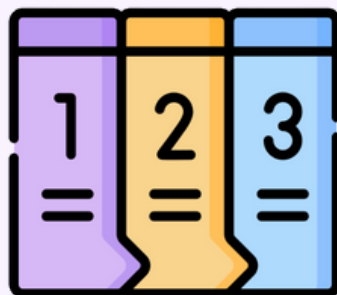
Introduction

Autism Friendly Blarney (AFB) was set up in November 2023 by a group of local parents who wanted to make Blarney a more inclusive, accessible, and welcoming place for autistic people and their families.

Since then, the committee has worked closely with local businesses, community organisations, and public services to introduce autism-friendly practices and spaces throughout the town.

Over the last 2 years Autism Friendly Blarney has concentrated on laying strong foundations by community engagement, recruiting champions, raising awareness, and delivering inclusive and sensory-friendly events.

This three-year plan builds on that progress and sets out the key goals and actions that will help Autism Friendly Blarney work towards achieving official Autism Friendly Town accreditation.



Registered Champions

- Blarney Woollen Mills Hotel
- Blarney Woollen Mills Shop
- Christies Bar & Restaurant
- The Mill Restaurant
- The Castle Hotel
- Supervalu
- BFS Centra
- The Muskerry Bar & Restaurant
- Walsh's Allcare Pharmacy
- Blarney Castle
- The Yoga Space
- Blarney GAA
- EMF Lifting and Laughing
- Club Ceoil
- DAK Flooring
- Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland
- Blarney Wellness Centre
- Blarney Library
- Blarney Scouts
- YAA Art Studio
- Garda Siochana
- Giddy Up Cutz
- Blarney Credit Union
- Tower Medical Centre
- An Post, Blarney
- SBG Cork
- Centra Village
- Horgans
- Osbournes Butchers
- Foroige Whitechurch
- The Harmony Hub



Vision

Our vision is for Blarney to be a town where autistic people and their families are understood, welcomed, and supported to fully participate in community life. Autism Friendly Blarney aims to create lasting change that benefits the entire community.

We envision a Blarney where:

- Autistic people feel acknowledged, included, and respected
- Families can attend events and activities with inclusive accommodations and practices
- Community spaces and public environments are designed with sensory needs in mind
- Businesses and organisations prioritise inclusion and accessibility
- Autistic voices are valued and represented



Mission

The mission of Autism Friendly Blarney is to work in partnership with AslAm, local stakeholders, and the wider community to remove barriers, increase understanding, and create meaningful, autism-friendly change and opportunities across Blarney.

We are committed to:

- Promoting inclusion and accessibility in community life
- Supporting autistic children, teenagers, and their families
- Empowering local businesses, organisations and services to make practical, sustainable changes
- Ensuring autistic voices guide our work
- Delivering measurable, community-led initiatives aligned with Autism Friendly Town accreditation



Questionnaire Feedback

As part of developing this three-year town plan, an “Autistic Voices” questionnaire was shared on social media and through local groups to reach autistic residents and families in Blarney. Co-production is important, and we wanted to hear directly from autistic people about what works well in the village, what creates barriers, and what changes would make everyday life more comfortable and inclusive.

Responses came in various formats, from both children and adults, giving us a broad view across different age groups.

The feedback shows that many autistic residents appreciate the friendliness and manageable size of the village, but regularly face challenges around noise and sensory environments, access to safe and calm spaces, and the lack of inclusive activities.

Key Themes Identified:

1. Noise and Sensory Overload in Public Spaces
2. Need for Quiet, Safe, and Calm Spaces
3. Inclusive Activities and Events
4. Autism Informed Staff and Community Members



1. Noise and Sensory Overload in Public Spaces

Noise was the most common issue raised. Crowds, loud environments, and high-pitched hand dryers were mentioned as particular problems.

One child spoke about noise levels in restaurants.

Another said hand dryers *"hurt my ears and frighten me."*

A teenager described some restaurants as *"often overcrowded and way too loud."*

How to incorporate this into our plan:

- Promoting quiet/sensory hours among champions
- Promoting sensory accommodations among champions
- Encouraging the availability of paper towels in bathroom facilities
- Quiet spaces in larger shops and restaurants



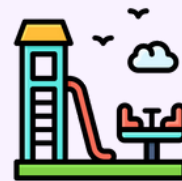
2. Need for Quiet, Safe, and Calm Spaces

Many responses emphasised the need for places where they can feel calm and safe, such as quiet areas in cafés, a larger library, and enclosed outdoor spaces.

One adult said the library should be “a sanctuary” but is too small. A parent described the playground as unsafe because it isn’t enclosed.

How to incorporate this into our plan:

- Creating more quiet spaces in the community where possible
- Improving playground safety



3. Inclusive Activities and Events

Families and young people highlighted the lack of activities designed with autistic participants in mind. Many said there are plenty of options for neurotypical children, but very few for neurodivergent children.

One response said there were *"lots of activities for neurotypical children and nothing for ND children."* Another child asked for *"fun stuff that my family can do with me."*

How to incorporate this into our plan:

- Development of inclusive, sensory-aware activities and events for children & families.

Suggested activities included:

- Dance, drama, art, and music
- Sports and outdoor activities
- Summer workshops
- Low-key community events



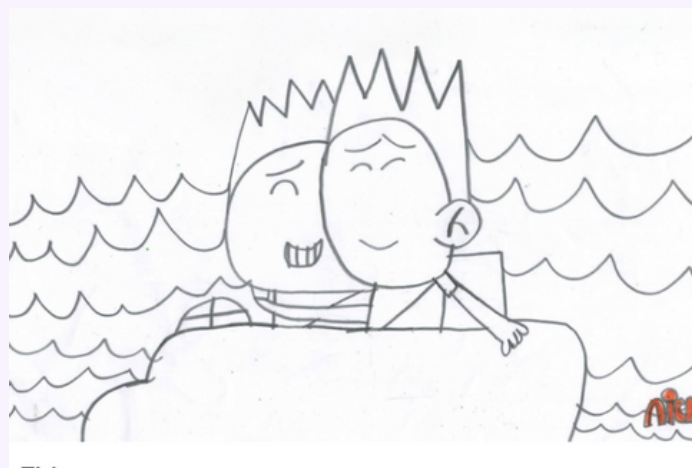
These drawings were submitted by an autistic child for whom drawing is an easier way to share their thoughts and experiences.

The first picture, showing two children eating ice creams, was his response to what he likes about Blarney, reflecting simple, positive moments out in the village.



The second drawing, showing two children in a boat, was his answer to what activities he would like to see. His mum explained that this represents his wish to go sailing in the lake with his brother.

The drawings show how important inclusive, family-friendly activities are, and how creative approaches help make sure every voice is heard.



4. Autism Informed Staff and Community Members

Respondents stressed the importance of understanding and supportive interactions in shops, cafés, and public services. Families said staff awareness and simple supports can make a big difference.

One parent asked for *“staff that understand autism and not staring or making a fuss if I am having a hard time.”* Another said clearer shop layouts would reduce stress.

How to incorporate this into our plan:

- Promoting staff training among champions
- Providing practical feedback and guidance when needed
- Coproduction & updating visual guides
- Building an online library of visual guides and other resources available to download online



Strategic Objectives 2025 - 2028

Over the next three years, Autism Friendly Blarney will focus on the following strategic objectives. These objectives align with AsIAM's Autism Friendly Town framework and respond directly to identified needs within the local autistic community.



To develop and deliver an inclusive summer activity programme for autistic children and teenagers



To continue developing and expanding autism-friendly family events within the community



To work collaboratively with local councillors to develop sensory-friendly and inclusive public spaces in Blarney



To explore and establish a social club for autistic children and teenagers, subject to community demand

Objective 1: Autism-Friendly Summer Activity Programme

Specific

To design and deliver an autism-friendly summer activity programme for autistic children and teenagers in Blarney, providing structured, inclusive, and supportive opportunities during school holidays.

Measurable

- Number of activities delivered
- Number of participants
- Feedback from families and participants
- Accessibility supports provided (visual guides, sensory accommodations)

Achievable

Autism Friendly Blarney has demonstrated the capacity to deliver inclusive events and workshops through successful initiatives in 2024 & 2025. Our existing relationships with champions and local stakeholders have allowed us to access resources to make our events a success.

Relevant

School holidays can be particularly challenging for autistic children and families due to the change of routine and extremely limited accessible activities. This programme hopes to address an identified gap and need in the local community for inclusive summer activities for autistic children

Time-Based

Programme development in Year 2.

Programme expansion or refinement in Year 3



Objective 2: Autism-Friendly Family Events

Specific

To continue and expand the delivery of autism-friendly family events in Blarney, ensuring that community celebrations and seasonal activities are accessible to autistic families.

Measurable

- A number of autism-friendly events delivered annually
- Attendance by local autistic children & adults
- Use of sensory supports and visual guides
- Family feedback and evaluation

Achievable

AFB has already successfully co-facilitated sensory-friendly spaces at festivals, and organised larger-scale seasonal initiatives such as sensory-friendly Santa experiences in collaboration with key community partners.

Relevant

The development and delivery of inclusive family events reduces isolation, promotes community participation, fosters awareness and understanding.

Time-Based

Ongoing across all three years, with continuous review and improvement.



Objective 3: Sensory-Friendly Public Spaces

Specific

To work with local councillors, Cork County Council, and community partners to improve the sensory accessibility of public spaces in Blarney.

Measurable

- Engagement with local council representatives
- Identification of priority spaces
- Implementation of agreed sensory-friendly features

Achievable

AFB has already developed relationships with local councillors and is currently liaising with them around an autism friendly design for the community playground refurbishment. One local representative has committed to providing funds for a communication board also.

AFB has also consulted with a local community group around developing sensory friendly features in the ongoing refurbishment of 'The Fen', a local walking trail and nature reserve.

Relevant

Accessible public spaces are essential for participation, wellbeing, and inclusion for autistic people of all ages.

Time-Based

Engagement and planning in Year 1, direct liaison with local council representatives in Year 2 with hope for incremental improvements across Years 2 and 3.



Objective 4: Social Club for Children and Teenagers

Specific

To assess community demand and, where appropriate, establish an autism-friendly social club for children and teenagers in Blarney.

Measurable

- Consultation & feedback outcomes
- Attendance and engagement levels
- Regularity of sessions

Achievable

AFB has strong links with families, schools, and support organisations and will build on this network to assess need and feasibility.

Relevant

Many autistic children and teenagers experience social isolation. A social club would provide a safe, supportive space to build friendships and confidence.

Time-Based

Needs assessment in Year 2, potential implementation in Year 3.



Risk & Mitigation

It is important to identify potential risks and challenges to achieving our objectives and successful delivery of our town plan. Outlined below are key risks, and practical measures to address these.

1. Volunteer capacity



Potential Risk: Volunteer fatigue and limited availability

Impact: Delays and reduced delivery of activities

Mitigation measures: Shared responsibilities across committee; realistic planning; phased delivery; volunteer recruitment through community and Champions; regular committee check-ins

2. Funding & Resources



Potential Risk: Insufficient funding

Impact: Inability to deliver planned activities

Mitigation measures: Community fundraising; sponsorship and support; shared resources with stakeholders; careful budgeting and prioritisation

3. Community Engagement



Potential Risk: Lower than expected participation

Impact: Activities not meeting community needs

Mitigation measures: Ongoing consultation with families; flexible programme design; pilot initiatives; strong communication via website and social media

4. Inclusivity & Accessibility at Events

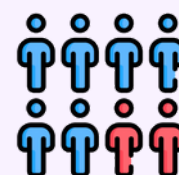


Potential Risk: Unmet sensory or accessibility needs

Impact: Negative experience for participants

Mitigation measures: Advance planning; visual guides; sensory break spaces; sensory supports; trained volunteers

5. Demand Exceeding Capacity



Potential Risk: Excess demand for activities

Impact: Exclusion or disappointment for families

Mitigation measures: Well organised booking system; clear communication of limits; phased expansion if needed

3 Year Plan Summary

Year 1:

- Continued recruitment of Champions
- Development of website & online visual guide library
- Continued delivery of autism-friendly family events
- Delivery of various workshops
- Initial engagement with local councillors

Year 2:

- Apply for 'Autism Friendly Town Award'
- Planning and development of a summer workshop programme
- Continuation of inclusive family events
- Continue to work with Champions to improve sensory accommodations and environments
- Consultation on demand for a social club
- Liaise with councillors on the creation and improvement of sensory-friendly public spaces

Year 3:

- Pilot social club if demand is identified
- Refinement and continuation of all programmes
- Planning for long-term goals for year 4, and beyond