



A Vision for the Grand Canal Basin

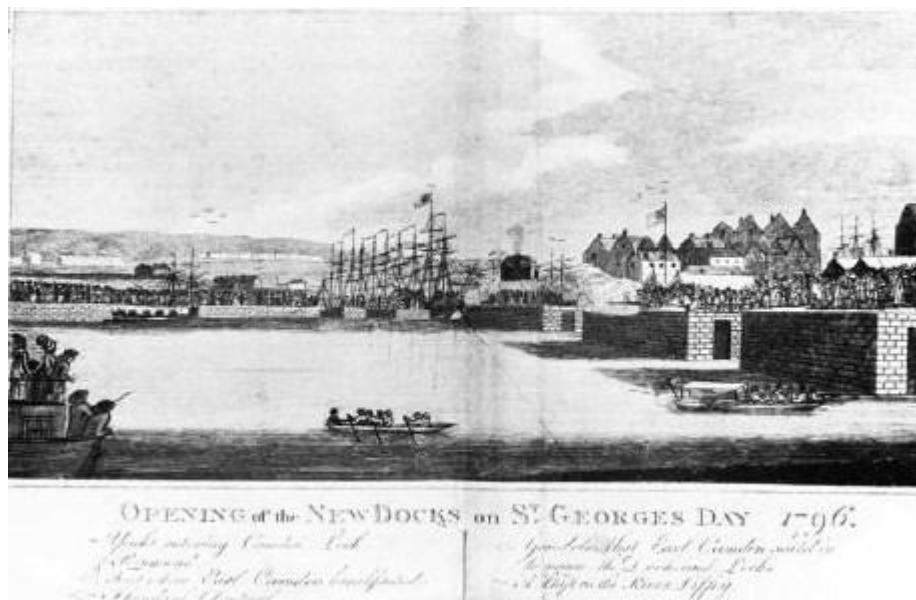
Position Paper: Proposal for the protection and restoration of the Grand Canal Basin & Plot 8

Alan Robinson with map graphics from Nicholas Cloake

Overview

"The heritage of Dublin is a unique resource which is fundamental to the cultural identity of the city and the quality of life of its citizens" [Dublin City Council].

The regenerated Docklands has created 40,000 jobs with in excess of 25,000 employed in the IFSC area alone.¹ The level of commercial development over the next five to ten years should equate to approximately 23,000 additional jobs. To support this growth, the area requires more open space for new and current residents and employees. To meet this requirement we should preserve, restore and reuse what remains of the Docklands' maritime heritage and the areas immediately surrounding it.



The opening of the Graving Docks at Ringsend on the 23rd April 1796. The entrance to the three docks on the right & a large sailing vessel entering the basin through the Camden Lock in the centre can clearly be seen.

Proposal

The Docklands Business Forum is proposing that the Graving Docks and the surrounding area of Plot 8 be set aside for recreational open space. It is our considered view that this will have significant long-term economic and social benefits for both the immediate area and Dublin city in general. The preservation, restoration and reuse of the Graving Docks and sea lock gates in and immediately adjacent to this area will provide a tangible link between the historic maritime and commercial roles of the Docklands and its contemporary use as a world-class hub of innovation and enterprise. It will provide a strong contextual environment for the development of modern architecture and bring necessary recreation space for the growing number of residents and employees in this developing area.

¹ North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock Draft Planning Scheme 2013

We are further proposing that the Grand Canal Basin be developed as a destination for international yachting tourism and water recreational activity. In addition, a Docklands History Trail should be developed throughout the surrounding area.

The restorations of similar areas of maritime heritage have proved a fantastic success in other countries including Les Berges de Seine in Paris and the Albert Dock in Liverpool.



Sweden's National Champaign Caroline Djupsjo performs at the 4th Waterways Ireland Docklands Summer Festival. Organised by the Docklands Business Forum the festival demonstrates the remarkable potential for the Grand Canal Basin. 60,000 people attended in 2014.

These proposals are compatible with what we understand to be Waterways Ireland's preferred use of the area and we support Waterways Ireland as the lead agency for delivering this project.

Scope

This position paper identifies the key tenets, or building blocks to delivering on the proposal outlined above.

Key Tenets of Proposal

"The Grand Canal Basin, right in the heart of Dublin, could be teeming with as much life and vibrancy as Dun Laoghaire every weekend" [Docklands Business Forum].

The initiatives listed below have been identified by the Docklands Business Forum as being central to the restoration and meaningful use of the Grand Canal Basin and Plot 8:

1. Camden Lock should be restored to enable large vessels to once again enter the Grand Canal Basin.

As its hand-carved inscription boldly states, the Camden Lock Gate was built in 1796. As the materials used to build the lock were large blocks of Leinster granite and Dublin 'calp' limestone, most of the construction is still in situ.² The lock gate is one of the largest on the island's canal network, and would, if restored, allow large boats and recreational vessels to enter the basin once again.

² A case for conservation of the Graving docks at Ringsend, Jamie McNamara, Trinity College Dublin 2012

The European Commission has identified international maritime tourism as a major growth area for the Union's tourist market.³ One of the original stated strategic goals for the area was the promotion and development of tourism in the Docklands.⁴ It is the view of the Docklands Business Forum that the restoration of this lock gate would not only preserve an important piece of Dublin's Georgian heritage, but that it would also bring back into service a very useful piece of infrastructure.

2. All three historical Graving Docks should be preserved, restored and reused.

"The heritage of Dublin is a unique resource which is fundamental to the cultural identity of the city and the quality of life of its citizens".⁵

Industrial heritage refers to the buildings and structures utilised in manufacturing, transportation, processing, and conversion of raw materials into finished goods.

The few remaining pieces of maritime heritage in the Docklands give cultural depth and identity to the area's strikingly modern urban space. It is the studied view of the Docklands Business Forum that, where possible and practical, these links with our commercial history should be preserved, restored and reused.

The three Graving Docks at Plot 8 are ideal structures for practical reuse.

- The smallest should be used for the purpose for which it was built in the 1790s – namely, mending boats. There is no longer a dry-docking facility in the Dublin area. Returning this dock to one of its original purposes is appropriate and practical.
- The middle Dock should become a young children's play area. The ground surface can be lined with absorbent rubber with an appropriate nautically themed design. The wall can be used as a low-level climbing area. There are many international examples of similar structures being put to this use - see image below.

³ European Commission Challenges and Opportunities for Maritime and Coastal Tourism in the EU 2012

⁴ Docklands Area Master Plan, 2008, Strategic Goals, Section 7, Page 198

⁵ Dublin City Development Plan, Dublin City Council, 2005 - 2011, p. 70



Les Berges de Seine. An image from the quays along the River Seine where the quay wall is used as a children's climbing area. Note how the fixtures are carefully placed along the run of the mortar so as to protect the original stone and how the equipment is tastefully incorporated into the original fixtures.

- The third and largest Graving Dock should be excavated and developed into an amphitheatre. This Graving Dock is the most dramatic but as it was filled in some decades ago and unfortunately its level of preservation is unknown. It most likely remains under a layer of rubble and concrete.
3. The area immediately surrounding and between the Graving Docks should be landscaped as a recreational area for local residents and employees.

As important pieces of Dublin's industrial and maritime heritage, it is wholly inappropriate for the Graving Docks to be incorporated into an office or residential building. The docks and surrounding area need to be open and landscaped for people to visit and enjoy.
 4. A pedestrian and cycle route should be developed from Ringsend Road, across Plot 8, over the lock gates, along Hanover Quay and on to Grand Canal Square and beyond. This proposal complements Dublin City Council's own plans for a cycle route along the River Dodder.

The public path along the eastern end of Plot 8 is a popular pedestrian route into the Docklands for employees. The level of use will increase as the surrounding area is further developed. It is only reasonable that this appropriate use be encouraged and further facilitated.

5. A striking modern commercial building can be placed at the northern end of the plot as a contemporary legacy building at the entrance to the Basin.

Well-preserved historical structures and strikingly modern ones, can side by side, complement each other. It is therefore the view of the Docklands Business Forum that a modern building at the northern end of Plot 8 should be built.

There is ample space at the site which could incorporate the site of the Waterways Ireland lock-keeper's house and yard to the edge of Plot 8 at the confluence of the canal and Rivers Dodder & Liffey. We understand Waterways Ireland have no objection to the lock-keepers house being demolished, a mid twentieth century pebble dash house of no architectural value.

It is of regret that the building height restriction for this site as set out in the Strategic Development Zone is so limiting. The Docklands Business Forum and many others argued that this unnecessary limitation should not be imposed. If possible, efforts should be made to reverse this restriction. As arguably the most historically interesting site in the whole Docklands it is imperative that the planning and development presents the best possible solution.

6. The Basin itself should be largely used as a mooring area for visiting international yachts thus adding a new dimension to Dublin's tourist offerings while also creating jobs.

The underutilised Grand Canal Basin can become a world-class luxury yachting destination facilitating over 300 yachts at any one time. With the European Commission identifying maritime tourism as a key growth area and reports indicating that multi-occupant yachts spend on average €500 a night, there is an unprecedented opportunity for Dublin's Communications and Financial Hub to also become a major international tourist destination.⁶

An average of 300 yachts berthing in Docklands over a four-month season would inject €18,000,000 into the local economy creating over 600 new jobs.⁷

Dublin's Docklands is an attractive location for tourists. It offers a host of the city's most contemporary cafes, bars and restaurants. It is the location of the Convention Centre Dublin, the 3 Arena (formally the O2), the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre and Shelbourne Park Greyhound Stadium. There are seven world-class hotels in Docklands including the Marker and the Gibson. With a Luas line in north Docklands, the DART in south Docklands and an Aircoach route running through Docklands the area is one of the nation's best served with public transport. Both the River Liffey Quays and the Grand Canal Basin have been extensively refurbished over recent years.

The existence of such an underused water network in the heart of the city presents a remarkable opportunity to add a whole new dimension to Dublin's tourist and recreational offerings.

There is no reason why the Docklands' waterfront cannot be as busy and as popular as Dun Laoghaire's.

⁶ European Commission Challenges and Opportunities for Maritime and Coastal Tourism in the EU 2012

⁷ Based on Fáilte Ireland's key to tourist job creation 'Tourism Facts 2013'. Published 2014.



How the Docklands Business Forum imagines a pontoon jetty along the southern end of the Grand Canal Basin leaving the western end free for water sports and events.

7. The Campshires along Hanover Quay should incorporate children's and adults' recreation areas.

It is consistently noted that Docklands is not young-family-friendly to the new professional residents in the area. This is an issue that can easily be addressed by providing play areas along Hanover Quay. Such areas can be very inexpensive, add life and colour to the quay and attract young families into the area.



An example of one of the many inexpensive play areas along the Campshires by the River Seine in Paris.

8. A Docklands History Trail



The Malton History Trail in Dublin's City Centre. A similar History Trail can identify the points of Docklands historic significance.

A Docklands History Trail should be developed with traditionally crafted cast iron signs placed at the many locations of historical interest in the Docklands; Boland's Mill at Ringsend Road, Grand Canal Basin, Lock Gates at the confluence of the Rivers Dodder and Liffey, Graving Docks at Plot 8, Sir John Rogerson's Quay, CHQ Building, Scherzer Bridges on Custom House Quay, the North Wall Railway Station, the Point Depot and London & North Western Hotel.

Such a trail will attract attention to, and interest in, Docklands' historic maritime past and enhance the attraction to visitor of this increasingly important area of the city.

Conclusion

There is widespread support among the local business community and beyond for our proposals. It is the considered view of the Docklands Business Forum that to build an apartment or office block above or immediately adjacent to the Graving Docks would be a sad return to the heritage damaging planning policies of the recent past and a wasted opportunity to preserve and utilise the city's maritime history and culture.

There are too many vested interests vying for a piece of Plot 8. The final planning decision should be simple; it should provide for an amenity to all local residents, local employees and visitors from our city and beyond.



This Paper makes the case that there is a unique cultural and commercial potential for the area in question. The alignment of the two presents a rare opportunity to unlock the real potential of the Basin and its immediate environs. Historical pieces of Dublin's Georgian heritage can be restored and life, vibrancy and jobs can be brought to the area.

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