

Docklands SDZ Amendments

Response by the Docklands Business Forum to
the Amendments of the North Lotts & Grand
Canal Dock Draft Planning Scheme

Alan Robinson

North Lotts & Grand Canal Dock Draft Planning Scheme

This document is a submission on behalf of the Docklands Business Forum to the proposed amendments to the North Lotts & Grand Canal Planning.

The Dublin Business Forum welcomes this opportunity to engage with Dublin City Council on its vision for the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock and the sequent amendments. As the primary business representation body in the area, representing over 35,000 employees, we are ideally placed to represent the views of the business community in this important matter. Business, and the promotion of business, is a key enabler in the future growth of the local and national economy. It is therefore essential the views of the Business Forum be given serious consideration and we look forward to further engagement with the Council on this matter.

4.1.4.4 Office Typologies

We note the amendment “...the provision of incubator space and start-up facilities as part of conventional office development will be encouraged...”

Incubators need more focus and specific resources from DCC. We are lucky to have a wide range of incubators in the Docklands and with the right support from DCC, EI, IDA and the DBF we can help them find the next Google, Facebook or LinkedIn business idea. We know from the Realex Payments experience that if we do not give start ups the right commercial infrastructure they require they will find it in London or Eastern Europe.

4.6 Built Heritage

The Docklands Business Forum supports BH12 “To explore the potential of exhibition or cultural heritage facilities in conjunction with national cultural institutes and key stakeholders to celebrate the unique maritime and industrial heritage of the Docklands Area.”

The City Council’s reliance on its established network for cultural institutions and organisations is causing it to overlook some exciting and unique possibilities in the Docklands.

It is the DBF’s view, expressed in our own submission to the Planning Scheme, that too much of the Docklands maritime and commercial heritage has been left to rot and rust. This neglect is all the more striking when one considers the amount of resources invested in all sorts of projects over recent years.

- The large lock gate, Camden Lock, into the Grand Canal Dock has been in a state of disrepair and unusable for decades. While we welcome the initiative to attract cruise traffic coming into Dublin we would query why this practical piece of the City’s Georgian and maritime heritage has been left unused. It is the view of the DBF that repairing Camden Lock would enable larger ships to enter the Grand Canal Dock. This would open up significant opportunities for attracting national and international boating visitors’ right into the heart of the city.
- We are working hard to bring about the restoration of the Graving Docks at Grand Canal Basin so that they can be of use once more for dry docking barges, boats and small ships.

These important artefacts of the area's commercial and maritime history can once again be of practical benefit to the local economy as working dry docks and visitor attractions.

- The Campshire along North Wall Quay have been refurbished beautifully and at great expense but are almost entirely unused. Any new planning scheme should ensure that there are cafes, restaurants and similar enterprises located in the area, but not on the Campshire itself, to help make maximise use of this facility. Dublin Port should be encouraged to locate some of their historical industrial hardware on the North Wall Quay for people to see and enjoy.
- Furthermore, it is our view that a use should be found for the Diving Bell on the Campshire of Sir John Rogerson's Quay. We suggest a cafe, with tables and chairs on the Campshire. This would be an excellent use of an authentic piece of Docklands history.

4.7 Culture & 4.9 Tourism & Leisure

The DBF is strongly of the view that the area's potential cultural contribution to the City's life, particularly in the areas of tourism and leisure facilities is an untapped resource in the Docklands. With all the life and vibrancy in the area it is important to point out that in the evenings and weekends many areas of the Docklands remain a largely empty of activity.

- In 2011, the Docklands Business Forum, on a voluntary basis, replaced it with the Waterways Ireland Docklands Summer Festival based on Grand Canal Dock. This Festival has proven increasingly successful, attracting over 60,000 visitors during its weekend of activities in 2012. The Festival has the support of all stakeholders in the area from business to community to public bodies including Dublin City Council and is showing all the signs of developing into a sustainable and significant event in the city's cultural calendar.
- The Docklands Business Forum have also partnered with Dublin Port to create the Dublin Port River Fest. The inaugural festival will be held along North Wall Quay on the June Bank Holiday weekend of this year. For this event the Forum has leveraged its extensive network of businesses organisations and community groups to create an exciting network of partners across the Docklands including the Poolbeg Yacht Club, Sail Training Ireland, Luas, The Gibson Hotel, 98FM, Metro Herald, Dublin City Council, The Old Gaffers Association and many more. We are very confident this will quickly develop into Ireland's premier annual maritime event.
- The Docklands Business Forum would question the value making significant investment in large once-off events. It is our view that better value is achieved through making the same resource investment into growing sustainable annual Festivals which are a more effective way of promoting the varied and many resources the Docklands has to offer. Such annual events will also provide a more reliable and sustainable source of revenue for local businesses.

The DBF continue to have considerable success in promoting the Docklands as a place to visit. We remain committed to harnessing the tourism and leisure potential that the area has to offer and

firmly believe that a very great deal can be achieved with the existing maritime and historical resources within the Docklands.

4.8 Retail

We note that 4.8.4.4 Active Frontage & Street Animation there is an amendment stating that “it will be an objective to secure a concentration of quality active uses including retail, cultural and amenity uses at the location of the proposed bridge crossings, protected structures and strategic public transport connections.” It is also stated that this text refers to the North Wall Quay and Britton Quay.

The Docklands Business Forum believes there should be no development on the Campshire between Samuel Beckett Bridge and the East Link Bridge. We wish to see the North Wall Quay once again used as a boating amenity. This facility is a significant resource for the city and has the potential to attract large tourist numbers from home and abroad.

Any development on the Campshire, other than that directly related to facilitating boating such as pontoons, will greatly damage this facility. The North Wall Quay is the longest and clearest stretch of usable and navigable quay left in the city and should be protected.

There is equal potential for the Grand Canal Basin for boating and water sports. The DBF is of the informed view that the Basin could be used for international water sporting events with potentially large numbers of spectators along the Campshires. Great sensitivity should be applied to ensuring that there is no development along these Campshires that could compromise this exciting city water attraction.

4.10.6 Height in SDZ

The Docklands Business Forum is concerned that the height restrictions and densities are too conservative and restraining. The consequence of this will be that the developments will not be commercial and businesses will move elsewhere to meet their needs.

- The height and density restrictions are far too limiting. The confidence in the future of the area expressed in the text of the original document fails to translate into the planning of commercial space. Even during the present economic recession there is an acknowledged shortage of commercial office space suitable for large organisations. This will only become more pronounced when the economy turns around. If the remaining area is developed with the height restrictions and densities proposed, it would be an appalling lost opportunity and represent a failure of responsibility on behalf of Dublin City Council.
- The eastern ends of the quays are the ideal location for taller denser buildings. This would serve a dual purpose of supplying much needed commercial space while also providing the iconic structures that are needed at the river entrance to the city. In a world where such buildings are considered tangible expressions of confidence it is of concern to the DBF that the planning authority is so reticent to be more visionary in its approach to developing the last remaining plots of the city’s premier business and corporate hub.

It is a striking fact that after so many years of unprecedented levels of development, the tallest structures in the Docklands remain the forty year old Liberty Hall at one end and the even older chimney's of the Poolbeg Generating Station on the other.

5.4.5 Height as part of the Urban Structure

We note that in section 5.4.5 it states "careful design is required in the vicinity of quayside protected structures and to avoid undue overshadowing."

The DBF warmly welcome the original documents suggestion that new uses could be found for the few heritage buildings that remain in the Docklands. We reject, what seems to be implied by the above amendment, the planning appetite for reducing the building height of sections of new office buildings adjacent to older buildings, such as 33 Sir John Rogerson's Quay beside the Ferryman public house and hotel. Such restrictions destroy the architectural integrity of the new building while doing nothing for the old.

The architectural integrity and beauty of Trinity Church in New York, at the intersection of Wall Street and Broadway, is not one bit impugned by the adjacent tall buildings.

6.1 Implementing the SDZ/Delivery Framework

The DBF is strongly of the view that the membership of any committee set up to oversee the implementation of the STZ must be dramatically different from its effective predecessor, the DDDA Council, if it is to have any meaningful contribution. There must be no defaulting back to failed structures of the past.

- Any new consultative structure must be robust, fit for purpose, transparent and representative of the Docklands of 2013.
- There must be equal representation of new and indigenous communities.
- There must be significant representation from the business communities elected, in an open, free and fair way, by members of the Docklands Business Forum.
- There must be term limits for membership of any new body to ensure new ideas are generated and members are aware they have only a set period to make their contribution.

6.3.1 Development Contributions

The business community want more clarification immediately on their proposed levies and fees for all this development. These levies were not discussed in the SDZ consultation process. We have paid millions in levies already and we are sending millions each year in rates and taxes to DCC and the State. We have enough uncertainty and risk in our businesses and we deserve certainty on this immediately. Some businesses seem to be paying DCC and property mgmt. companies for the same services, e.g. traffic light installations.

6.5 Monitoring Progress

The DBF is strongly of the view that the membership of any committee set up to replace the DDDA Council must be dramatically different from its predecessor if it is to have any meaningful contribution. There must be no defaulting back to failed structures of the past.

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