

Docklands SDZ

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

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1. Introduction

The Docklands Business Forum¹ (DBF) is the business association for the Dublin Docklands and is recognised as the primary business organisation by the Dublin Docklands Area Master Plan 2008². With more than 100 member organisations, representing over 35,000 employees, the DBF is a key stakeholder in the Docklands' area.

The aims and objectives of the DBF are:

- To act as a representative voice of business in the area.
- To act as a networking facility for businesses in the docklands area.
- To initiate joint marketing programmes promoting our membership's products and services to the docklands community and beyond.
- To promote the docklands as a great place to visit and enjoy.
- To encourage local businesses to get involved with the local community and environment.
- To encourage the development of an enterprise culture.
- To integrate Docklands Business with the wider Dublin Area.

The DBF believe that these roles are mutually compatible as exemplified by our regular networking meeting which foster a sense of engagement between the Docklands workforce and the area, our annual Docklands Volunteer Clean Up³ which encourages a sense a pride in the local infrastructure and our annual Docklands Business Awards⁴ which promotes and celebrates the areas enterprising culture.

It is widely acknowledged that the DBF, through its many and varied initiatives, has given important leadership to the wide spectrum of Dockland business.

2. North Lotts & Grand Canal Dock Draft Planning Scheme

The Docklands Business Forum welcomes the publication of the North Lotts & Grand Canal Dock Draft Planning Scheme. It is a long overdue response to the disengagement of the DDDA over the last few years as a result of its perilous financial situation. The DBF believe the publication of the Draft Scheme represents an opportunity to review both the successes and the shortcomings of the DDDA with a view to ensuring the emerging structure is fit for purpose both for today and into the future.

Furthermore, we believe the return of the responsibility, for the development of the country's premier business hub, to Dublin City Council is a positive development for both the Docklands and the City.

¹ www.docklandsbusinessforum.ie

² Policy ED13 Page 69

³ <http://docklandsbusinessforum.ie/docklands-cleanup/>

⁴ <http://docklandsbusinessforum.ie/business-award/>

Such a review and change in governance provides an exciting opportunity to complete the task of developing the regenerated Docklands in a more focussed, transparent and successful way than might otherwise have been the case.

3. Economic Regeneration & Employment

The DBF agrees in principle with the objectives as set out in the conclusion of section 4.1 of the Draft Scheme.

- The DBF welcome the acknowledgement that the Docklands is “considered a prime office location...attracting quality development and high value economic activity” as evidenced by the strong presence of multi-national and indigenous corporate entities. Many of these companies are members of the DBF and the Forum is very aware of the economic and social benefits they bring to the local and national economy.
- The small technology companies that have sprung up in the Docklands represent much of what is best and exciting about Ireland’s economic future. We welcome the attention paid to these organisations in the Planning Scheme.
- The Forum is of the view however, that, the important contribution made by the small and medium sized traditional service providers is easily over looked. Collectively, these companies provide a very large level of employment with a high proportion of their employees coming from the local community. These organisations are flexible, efficient and are conjointly a significant source of investment in the area.
- The infrastructural needs of all organisations must be taken into consideration in any final plan. To remain viable, all businesses, but particularly SMEs who are so dependent on footfall and ease of access, need generous street parking, loading bays, good public infrastructure and driver accessibility into, and around, the Docklands area. Local planning must take account of the varying needs of business from a requirement of a critical mass of similar enterprises to attract sufficient numbers of potential patrons to high visibility shop fronts.

4. Tourism and Leisure – Small Business Can Deliver

The DBF is strongly of the view that the area’s tourism and leisure facilities are 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.

- While we welcome the report’s audit of tourist activities we wish to point out that the Docklands Maritime Festival no longer exists. In 2011, the Docklands Business Forum, on a voluntary basis, replaced it with the Waterways Ireland Docklands Summer Festival⁵ 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

⁵ www.docklandsummerfestival.com

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 Fest⁶. 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.

5. Build Heritage

In keeping with our comments above it is the view of the DBF 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 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 enthusiastically support our friends in the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland's efforts to restore 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 history can once again be of practical benefit to the local economy as working dry docks and visitor attractions.

⁶ www.dublinriverfest.com

- 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 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.

While the DBF warmly welcome the Planning Scheme's suggestion that new uses could be found for the few heritage buildings that remain in the Docklands we do reject 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.

6. Nature and Extent of Proposed Development

While the Docklands Business Forum broadly welcomes the plan with regard to the nature and extent of proposed development we would have some concerns regarding the outlined height restrictions in the area.

- We believe the height restrictions are far too limiting. The confidence in the future of the area expressed in the text of the 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 tall 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 Forum 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.

7. Movement

The infrastructural development of the Docklands has failed to keep in pace with the commercial development. It is increasingly difficult to get clients and potential clients into and around the Docklands.

- Movement within the Docklands has become problematic, particularly since the turning restrictions placed on the roads around the Samuel Becket Bridge. These restrictions appear only to protect the toll income for the East Link Bridge. This is unacceptable.
- A new bridge at Benson Street must be a priority to remove the increasing sense of isolation felt by businesses at the eastern end of the Docklands. To protect future developments in the maritime activity on the Liffey all new bridges must be capable of opening and opening in good time. It is a shocking fact that the East Link Bridge, built nearly 30 years ago, can open and close in a matter of minutes whereas the new Samuel Beckett Bridge takes hours to complete the task.
- Private enterprise could provide a more efficient bus service to the Docklands within weeks. It is a priority of the Docklands Business Forum that this is done. It is the quickest, simplest and most efficient solution.

8. Environment, Open Space & Green Infrastructure

- The land parcels (or city blocks) may not be developed for a number of years. Provision of Green Space is linked to this development. It is the view of the DBF that green space should be front ended as this would add to the current amenity of the Docklands area. For instance, if the concrete infrastructure over the future Dart Station was built now in such a way as to allow for the development of the Dart Station beneath it at a future date then the planned Station Square could be built in advance.
- Also, apart from the very ambitious green space plans for Britain Quay and the Chocolate Factory site there is very little new Green Space planned for the south docks. A feasible strategy for existing and new streets that could be adopted might be 'greening the streets' by simply planting trees or placing trees and plants in planters. It would be visible, would add to the biodiversity of the area and enhance the air quality.

9. Governance

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.

- 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.

10. Conclusion

The Dublin Business Forum welcomes this opportunity to engage with Dublin City Council on its vision for the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock. 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.