



Docklands Maritime

Heritage and its Potential

**Response to Dublin City Council's Draft Water
Animation Strategy**

Alan Robinson

Response to Dublin City Council's Draft Docklands Water Animation Strategy

"There is no shortage of advice on tourism and waterfront regeneration but rather like the outcomes it is all safe, predictable and formulaic"

Anon 2013

Draft Water Animation Strategy for Docklands

The Docklands Business Forum (DBF) welcomes the Draft Water Animation Strategy for Docklands. We further welcome Dublin City Council stepping into a leadership role in realising the areas water based potential. As the land urban generation is in the process of concluding it is appropriate to turn attention to the empty water, one of the defining characteristic of the area.

The Grand Canal Basin has approximately 75,000 sq m of deep water basin largely underused. There is also 1.8km of largely empty River Liffey in Docklands. As the document correctly points out there are also other underused areas of maritime heritage including Georges Dock, Spenser Dock and a section of the River Dodder. Many cities can only wish to possess such an extraordinary resource.

The DBF believes any plan for the water and quays in Docklands should;

- Have clear strategic purpose complementing relevant local and national policy objectives.
- Has big thinking with ambition to contribute to the cultural and economic life of the city.
- Is appropriate in scale for a national and European capital.
- Matches the remarkable successes of private enterprise's investment in the area.

We accept the Animation Strategy as presented is a draft with work yet to be done. But with the above points in mind we are concerned the strategy as outlined is un-ambitious, cluttered and parochial.

This paper will very briefly outline relevant Docklands and Docklands Business Forum context for a response to Draft Water Animation Strategy and follow on with our concerns outlined in more detail.

Docklands

Dublin's Docklands is Ireland's most successful urban regeneration programme. The area declined rapidly during the 70's and 80's to become largely derelict by the 90's.



The Sea Organ at Zadar, Croatia. We may not need a Sea Organ in Docklands but we do need some big thinking.

Dockland's most notable successes over the past two decades are distinguished by bold ambition and capital investment. Private enterprise has invested over €10 billion in Docklands over the last twenty years. The Thee Arena is Ireland's largest indoor entertainment venue. The Bord Gais Energy Theatre is the largest privately funded purpose built theatre in over a century. The Convention Centre Dublin won the World's Leading Meetings & Conference Centre at the World Travel Awards last December. The Grand Canal Square is a world class urban space and some of the city's most sought after living spaces are Dockland apartments.

This extraordinary level of investment and success has led to over 40,000 world class careers. The area is now producing 9% of Ireland's GDP. Of the \$4.4 trillion of assets serviced in Ireland in 2017 over 80% resides in Dockland's financial institutions creating 16,000 jobs nationally.

Any plan for Docklands, including an animation strategy for the water and its quays, should be big, ambitious and equal surrounding success.

Docklands Business Forum

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

The purpose of the Docklands Business Forum is to ensure Docklands realises its full potential by becoming a world centre for international commerce, entrepreneurial innovation and maritime tourism. We offer businesses an opportunity to take part and contribute to a range of activities and

initiatives furthering these goals while also using their participation to create valuable networks for their own enterprise.

The DBF has long believed Docklands historical legacy of quays, canal basins and docks give it an unrivalled sense of place and the potential to add tourism as a significant industry in the area. Much of the infrastructure already exists; (i) excellent public transport, (ii) capacity in the areas public spaces and venues, (iii) much of the quaysides are in good condition, (iv) entertainment venues of national quality and (v) world class hotels. Tourism will create accessible jobs for Dublin's inner city community and should therefore be a priority for the three principle state stakeholders, Dublin City Council, The Dublin Port Company and Waterways Ireland when creating a water animation strategy. Tourism must play a key role in any water animation strategy for Docklands.

In 2013 the Docklands Business Forum conducted a census of businesses in the area. The result was the first Docklands Directory. There were a number of unforeseen benefits to the Directory including the identification of significant hospitality and live entertainment industry that had never been previously highlighted.

A subsequent study conducted by the Docklands Business Forum of these sectors found they collectively attract 3.6 million visitors per annum, inject €76.1 million annually into the local economy and employ over 1,500. This initiated the DBF's policy of developing Docklands as a new tourist hub for the capital.

It is in the interests of Dublin that the Docklands Water Animation Strategy builds on the platform of success that the local hospitality industry has created in contributing to the economy.

Draft Water Animation Strategy

We have a number of concerns regarding the draft Water Animation Strategy which we believe will need to be addressed before the plan moves to the next stage.

1. There is no big thinking or high end strategic goals in the plan.
2. The word tourism appears only 3 times in the document and in each context with indirect reference to the plan. As Fáilte Ireland has recently designated Docklands as a major growth cluster for the city the documents apparent lack of commitment to tourism is a serious fault.
3. There are no financial commitments made in the document from the 3 leading stakeholders to realising the animation strategy.
4. There are no financials on the new activities or any estimates on how much new activity will bring to the local economy. Considering the recent Taoiseach's Inner City Task Force Report and its ongoing implementation this is a missed opportunity to make the plan relevant to serious social issues in the area.



Big Thinking Water Animation. The Opera Stage on Lake Constance in Breganz Austria a town a fraction the size of Dublin. Dublin is the only European Capital without an Opera House.

5. The plan makes little effort to quantify the amount of visitors its new water animation will bring into the area and there is no effort to breakdown where visitors will come from. Thus the plan offers no guide to measure its success making the plan un-ambitious.

6. The plan is too cluttered. While we accept there must be a boundary line for the plan it should realise there continues to be useable river to the immediate west and a whole nautical world on the other side of the Eastlink Bridge.

7. The River Liffey east of the Samuel Becket Bridge, the outer Grand Canal Basin and the River Dodder north of the Ringsend Bridge are the only areas within the city where masted-vessels can enter and exit with ease. This significant fact and its implications are largely unnoticed in the plan. These areas should not be the location for a swimming pool (North Wall Quay) or Floating Parks (River Dodder). There are plenty of areas elsewhere that would be ideal for these initiatives where they would not hinder the coming and going of visiting vessels.

8. Yachting Tourism is identified as a major growth area for tourism in the European Union. The areas outlined in point 7 above are ideal for such activity. Such an initiative feeds well into the infrastructure already in place and will deliver a much needed tourism element to the plan. It will also join Docklands to Fáilte's Ancient East where visiting vessels can stay in Dublin for a few nights and move on to visit other areas along the north and south coasts.

Conclusion

In our view the plan needs a complete overhaul, more resources put into its creation and a commitment from all three stakeholders to make the animation of Docklands water resources something to rival the other Dockland success stories bringing investment, jobs and culture to the area.

We welcome Dublin City Council's recent announcement of a Water Park at Georges Dock. This demonstrates a commitment to the area and is an appropriate use of this particular piece of Docklands maritime heritage. We would like to see more of this type of big thinking from the other 2 stakeholders to realise the potential for the River Liffey from the East Link to the Custom House and the Grand Canal Basin.