

3.00 PHYSICAL CHARACTER OF THE AREA

3.01 The original Custom House Docks site

The site is very fully described in the original Planning Scheme. The dominant features of the site are the two water bodies, George's Dock to the south which is linked to the Inner Dock to the north, the larger of the two basins.

The Docks are constructed of cut limestone capped with granite edging. Surveys indicate that they are in good condition. The two dock basins, together with their linking canal and entrance lock, when taken with development as it has occurred to date in the form of the IFSC and commercial offices, as well as the conserved structures of Stack A and the Dock Offices, set a very distinct contextual basis for the future planning of the area. Map no. 2 indicates these features and shows the new "as built development" as well as f= proposals which are in the course of construction or at an advanced planning stage.

Aside from these main features there are many incidental elements such as cranes, cobble setts, etc. - all of which merit integration into the future development of the site. Very distinct designs for the treatment of roads, pavements and open areas, including street lighting, have already been determined and these will follow through in the future development of the site.

3.02 The An Post Sorting Office

This building occupies a site area of approximately 8,000 sq. metres and the building itself covers approximately 87% of the available land area. There is a narrow strip of open area lying between the building on the northern boundary of the Custom House Docks site. The ground floor level of the building relates to the ground level of Sheriff Street, which is approximately 2.4 metres below the general level of the Custom House Docks site.

The building itself is a purpose-built sorting office and can be divided into three different sections:

- a) A six-storey administration block.
- b) The three-storey sorting section.
- c) A single-storey vehicle workshop area.

Although it is a very specific building type, its structure, its Rely loading capacity, its column spacing, its natural lighting, its access, its location and its street frontage, offer a building which could be adapted to a number of different uses. Although it could be regarded as an honest, non-nonsense functional building, it is hard to see it as being one of outstanding architectural merit in an aesthetic sense. It is easy to imagine it being upgraded to modern user standards in terms of insulation, fire escape, etc. It is not a requirement of the Authority that the building be preserved, so that its demolition could be considered.

The section of Sheriff Street directly outside, and its surrounding area, are of interest. The street is cobbled and is virtually intact, pavements incorporate granite kerbstones and the ground floor facade to the former luggage stores attaching to Connolly Station, still remains. It is of robust stone construction and of some character. To the west is the main rail bridge of Connolly Station which is supported by very fine cast iron Doric columns surmounted with attractive brick arched walls.

In terms of urban design this section of Sheriff Street has a particular character of its own deriving from the robust nature of the materials used and the spatially enclosed character created by the railway bridge. The sorting office is at an appropriate height to the scale of the street, however as the street goes eastward there is a distinct drop towards single- two-, and three-storey developments with distant vistas to the Sheriff Street church of St. Laurence O'Toole.

3.03 Connolly Station

Connolly Station is an architectural feature in itself and its facade is listed for preservation in the Dublin Development Plan. The central tower acts as a focal point to views down North Earl Street/Talbot Street. Architecturally it is a neo- Classical Italianate structure to the Amiens Street frontage with a typical large span roof over the platform and track areas behind. The elevation to the Custom House Docks site proper features a series of brick arches which are attractive and give a particular scale and environmental quality to this end of the site.

3.04 Quayside area

The area includes three distinct bands:

- The busy roadway and pavement
- The quayside
- Part of the River Liffey

The quayside occupies an area of approximately 14.5 acres and the water body occupies 1 0 acres. The former Jetfoil terminal, now used as the Authority's offices, is the only modern structure and it contains approximately 966 sq. metres. It is a single storey building with an attractive elevation to the river front.

The quayside retains its stone dressings, capstans, etc. and it is likely that there are a number of original stone cobbles underneath the area's modern slabs of concrete and tarmacadam surfaces.

The roadway has an asphalt finish and is 13.7 metres wide on average, with some improvement work having been carried out to the pavement areas both on the northern and southern side of the road.

The principal visual and functional feature of the quayside is the lifting bridge which crosses the canal inlet into the Custom House Docks site from the River Liffey. This bridge is constructed of cast iron and is in need of attention and repair.

In urban design terms the general area is characterised by its open aspect which allows the elevations fronting onto the roadside to read as the main elevation to the river. It is these elevations, together with the strong line of the stone quayside which define the elevations onto the river. This section of the quayside forms a transitional zone from the enclosed urban character of the quays west of Butt Bridge to a more open character as one approaches the river mouth.

The area to the front of the Custom House has been recently transformed in that there is now a river walk along this section, thus marking its incorporation into the enclosed amenity city side of the river.

3.05 Former National Sports Centre Site

This site has been largely cleared. The remaining uses include two waste processing units, a public house and a repair garage. In addition the former B + 1 premises are currently used for training purposes under the auspices of FAS, and the yard behind for temporary car parking.

Aerial photograph no. 2 shows in graphic form the current condition of the site. The remaining buildings are in poor to fair condition.

The former B + 1 offices are the only structures which are economically capable of upgrading to good condition. In conservation terms the only significant structure is the rear elevation to the former Queen's Excise Store which fronts onto Mayor Street Lower. This structure is of cut stone and is in poor condition. The road surfaces are of interest in that there is a significant amount of cobbling and this lends a particular character to the area. There are some interesting elevations along North Wall Quay and one good quality stone-faced building, forming part of the B + 1 offices.

The area is impoverished in townscape terms, although the River Liffey frontage is in a civic sense the most important potential elevation, as it is the one which fronts onto the quays and acts as the space-containing element to the Liffey along with the quayside walls. Of potential importance is the Royal Canal if suitable access or visual contact could be developed with it. Also of importance are particular views towards buildings of prominence such as the St. Laurence O'Toole's Church and the view towards the IFSC which is seen looking westwards along Mayor Street.

3.06 Sheriff Street Flats site

The site is largely occupied by the well-known Sheriff Street flats which are in the course of being de-tenanted. There is one public house and a 38kv. station located in the north-western corner and there is an indoor sports centre located close to the St. Laurence O'Toole's Church. Construction is currently under way of 113 residential units ranging from 2-bedroom flats up to 4-bedroom houses on the northern section of the site.

These units are designed to accommodate the majority of the remaining tenants from the flats. Aerial photograph no. 3 illustrates the site. All the Corporation flats are structurally sound and could be described as being in fair condition. They have a certain strong architectural character and have the potential to be attractive in a redevelopment. In particular, the view along Mayor Street is quite striking. The surrounding roads, ie those around the Sports Centre site, have attractive cobble setts which in turn lend a particular character to the area.

The flats blocks are four storeys high and the new Corporation housing is three stories in height.