

6.0 OVERALL DESIGN INCLUDING MAXIMUM HEIGHT AND EXTERNAL FINISHES

Survey and Analysis

6.01 Introduction

Map no. 4 analyses in graphic form the particular characteristics of the enlarged site and the opportunities it presents as well as its negative aspects. The potential amenity value of the water bodies is evident, as are the poor environmental qualities of Commons Street, Mayor Street and Guild Street. This section of the Planning Scheme sets out the Authority's policies and objectives in relation to the overall design of the Area to ensure that there will be public confidence in the ultimate quality of the environment necessary to encourage the required level of investment and so ensure a commercially viable and realisable development.

6.02 The street pattern

The existing geometric grid street pattern is reflective of the Area's history as reclaimed land and this in itself gives it a particular character. The street widths, designed at the time to generous dimensions to cater for commercial traffic associated with the port are also characteristic of the Area.

The Authority will retain these street patterns, but recognises a requirement to upgrade the physical quality of the road and pavement surfaces, through rehabilitation works to the stone setts as well as new pavement surfaces. Good quality public lighting as well as landscaping and street furniture will also be an essential element in raising the visual quality of the streets concerned.

Mayor Street in particular offers the opportunity for upgrading and it is proposed to create a major new urban space at its centre which is shown linked in a visual sense by means of a new route through to the Liffey frontage via the former National Sports Centre site. This new square takes advantage of the potential created by the Queen's Excise Store and two blocks of the Sheriff Street flats to determine an attractively dimensioned space. The route through to the Liffey front will break up what is a very considerable block size, and provides a finger of open space through to the Mayor Street/Sheriff Street flats area, very much in line with the approach on the original site where a finger of open space penetrates as far back as the An Post sorting office. The sketch drawing below shows the intent and objective of the Authority. Building lines appropriate to the various streets are set out in Objectives Map no. 6. Generally these conserve existing building lines.

6.03 The water bodies

The water bodies represent the soul of the Custom House Docks Area and these must be exploited to the maximum for public amenity. Plans are well advanced for the detailed treatment of George's Dock, the Inner Dock and the area of quayside within the Authority's control, and some of the construction work has already been carried out. Although the section of quayside to the south of the former National Sports Centre site and the land immediately to the west of the Royal Canal are not within the Authority's control, the Authority's policy for those areas would be to encourage the owners to develop them as public amenities. As a particular project the Authority would favour the creation of a water link through the Sheriff Street flats site, thus linking the Inner Dock with the Royal Canal and reinforcing the waterside nature of the area. These objectives are illustrated on Map no.6.

6.04 Conservation

The commercial and environmental success of the new extended Custom House Docks Area will depend on the conservation of buildings and site features which lend a particular character and atmosphere to the Area.

A review has been carried out of the chapter on conservation in the original Planning Scheme and a survey has been carried out on structures and artefacts in the extended Area. The Authority is also cognisant of the listings contained in the Dublin Development Plan.

The Planning Scheme is specific in its policy in relation to some of the site features which are deemed to be irreplaceable assets. However, many buildings and elements have been adulterated over the years so that a rigid preservationist approach is inappropriate in many cases.

The following are the Authority's policies and objectives with regard to preservation and conservation on the enlarged site.

6.04.1 Stack A:

Stack A is characterised by a stunning cast iron roof structure supported by columns. It is constructed on top of a series of barrel vaults which have considerable character because of their sheer scale and massing. However, three of the elevations have undergone radical change over the years and the only elevation which survives in its original form is that facing north. The original southern elevation was amputated to cater for road widening and this in turn, set up an imbalance in the elevations facing east and west. The eastern elevation was built up and became a party wall. Internally, an intermediate loft floor was inserted at the northern end of the building involving short span construction requiring a multiplicity of props which restricted the use of the ground floor, already disadvantaged by being cut off from natural lighting from roof lights.

The Authority therefore will require the preservation and conservation of the vaulted area at basement level, the full height section of the structure overhead and the preservation of the north facing facade. It would welcome the creation of a new elevation onto the quayside which would display the internal structure to effect. The Authority would welcome additions to the western facade of the building which would have the effect of creating an integrated elevation and lively uses which would animate the George's Dock area.

6.04.2 Dock Offices:

The Dock Offices is seen as pivotal in the imagery of the Custom House Docks and its preservation and conservation is a priority. The Authority will consider extensions to the north of this building which would enhance this side of the canal link and provide a suitable economic base to ensure the continued preservation of the Dock Offices. The extension must not exceed the existing height of the Dock Offices.

6.04.3 Stack B:

It is the Authority's objective to secure the preservation of the vaults under Stack B as well as the northern elevation of this structure.

6.04.4 George's Dock.

It is the Authority's objective to preserve this Dock, including its quay walls and kerbstones, and to enhance its attractiveness for the public by the provision of suitable bollards, chains and public lighting.

6.04.5 Inner Dock:

It is the Authority's objective to retain a substantial water presence in the Inner Dock area and to preserve as much as is practical of the cut stone walls and edges to the Dock basin. It will require appropriate and sensitive treatment to the Dock edges in line with the design approach taken in George's Dock.

6.04.6 Lock entrance to the River Liffey:

It is the Authority's objective to secure the conservation and repair of these locks including the timber lock gates. The Authority will seek the removal or suitable treatment to the dam and sluice gates currently in place.

6.04.7 Arch stone gateway:

The former main stone gateway has been demolished, however the stones have been retained and numbered and it is the Authority's objective to see this gateway erected in a suitable location close to the main lock entrance to George's Dock.

6.04.8 Existing materials and artefacts:

All existing stone setts, cobbles and paving materials in good condition will be conserved for future integration into the design of open space, as will all artefacts such as cranes, capstans, hoists, etc.

6.04.9 Central Sorting Office:

The Authority has no conservation objectives in relation to this building. However, it will co-operate with the Planning Authority in the conservation of the attractive cobbled stone setts on Sheriff Street itself as well as improvements to this street in the form of landscaping measures.

6.04.10 Connolly Station:

It is the Authority's objective to - ensure the preservation of the station in line with the policy set out in the Dublin Development Plan, and also to ensure the conservation of the vaults underneath the station.

6.04.11 Quayside area:

The Authority will seek the conservation of all items of interest such as the quay walls, cobbles, capstans, etc., and in particular will seek the repair and improvement of the existing bascule-bridge.

6.04.12 Queen's Excise Store:

The Authority would require that the Queen's Excise Store be treated as a conservation priority and will seek to have the building mirrored in a modern creative way to the east in creating the new Mayor Street Square.

6.04.13 Buildings fronting North Wall Quay:

The Authority would favour the retention of the facade of North Wall House, including the characteristic stone arches and the stone-faced adjoining building. It will also seek to have the elements included in the Planning Authority's protected list, such as the remains of Grealish's pub facade, the arches at the former Henry Crosbie yard etc., incorporated into new development if such can be achieved in an aesthetically meaningful way at economic cost.

6.05 Building heights

Although the Urban Renewal Act refers to maximum heights, the Authority's view would be that the heights set down in the amended Planning Scheme should be the desired heights so that in a sense they are minimum heights as well. The original Planning Scheme did not address the issue of heights in a prescriptive way for all elevations. This has created practical difficulties for the Authority in achieving a coherent architectural and urban design format for the original site. In the light of this the Authority has decided to formulate a series of appropriate heights for all streets and urban spaces within its new enlarged area.

These heights are shown on Height Drawings nos. 1 to 5 and are expressed as a series of main parapet heights. The Authority will consider penthouses, plantrooms, lift motor rooms, etc. above parapet heights, provided they are suitably recessed and treated in an appropriate visual manner.

The height criteria result from a series of studies which examined the existing urban context, in particular the relationship between heights and the open space created by streets, squares, water bodies, etc., as well as known proposed developments and views to particular buildings, towers, spires, etc., such as the Custom House, the campanile of Connolly Station and the spire of St. Laurence O'Toole's Church. Climate and wind factors have also been taken into account.

The general height adopted, perhaps not surprisingly, is that which might be considered characteristic of Dublin's inner city which derives from its Georgian legacy, i.e. 4-5 storeys. There are also particular instances where two storeys or single storey is considered appropriate, such as the areas immediately located on George's Dock. In the case of the quayside, any public facility must be single-storey and ephemeral in its appearance.

The Authority would permit an additional storey to the retained Sheriff Street flats if structurally feasible. The Authority will also consider legitimate architectural elements such as spires, campaniles, special corner elements, etc., which contribute to the overall qualities of the building.

6.06 Materials

The essence of Dublin city centre architecture, in particular its Georgian architecture, is its self-effacing elegance, its limited palette of materials, in particular clay brick and stone, its considered relationship to public streets and spaces and its featuring of major set-piece prominent buildings, for example the Custom House, the Four Courts and City Hall.

The enlarged Custom House Docks site has its own particular character deriving mainly from the use of robust natural materials such as limestone, granite, clay brick and stone setts to the streets. Cast iron also features as a material, both as a robust material in winches, mooring posts, etc., and also as an elegant light structural material for roofing purposes and for window frames.

New development to date on the Docks site has featured a substantive use of stone materials as well as curtain walling with its extensive glazing. Also featured less successfully have been pre-cast concrete units. Future developments in relation to the housing and future office blocks indicate an extensive use of brick.

Colours in the enlarged area depend on the natural colouring of the materials such as the granite, the limestone and the natural mixed colour of brick work. New development on the site features a variety of stone material including limestone, granite, polished granite and York stone, with colours ranging through various shades of grey and buff. The predominant glazing colour is green. Buff-coloured pre-cast concrete units are a major feature of Harbourmaster 1 and 2. The existing conserved buildings have a palette of stock bricks ranging through yellows, terracottas and reds, and the proposed housing development, which will have a major impact in a visual sense, repeats these colours and seeks its inspiration from a marine palette of navy blues, creams, whites, etc., for other constructional elements.

Although the Authority would not require materials and colours to be slavishly contextual, it considers that materials and colours to be used in future development can take their cue- from the materials characteristic of the area. The Authority therefore requires that clay brick feature as one of the predominant building materials in future building. It will also seek to have natural stone used in elements of detail and in any building of importance forming a set- piece element of urban design. The Authority would also favour the use of lightweight elements in modern materials, particularly at roof level, as a response to the lightweight elegance found, for instance, in Stack A.

In terms of colours, the Authority will favour the natural colours of stone, such as granite, limestone and the variegated and mixed colours for brickwork in the yellow, terracotta and red ranges in elements such as window frames, balconies, etc., the Authority would favour designers choosing from the marine palette of navy blue, white and cream. Other typically marine materials such as timber and brass could also feature.

6.07 Architectural design

The Authority's firm belief is that it is the function of the architect to design the building elements and that in formulating the Planning Scheme it has set down a series of guidelines which will aid the talented designer in setting his or her building within the context of an overall coherent urban form. The Authority does require the very highest standards of architectural design and would ask architects to be conscious of using a considered architectural language in the treatment of entrances, corners, parapets, etc., in order to contribute to the overall quality of the redevelopment.

6.08 Signage:

The appearance of signs of all kinds, be they shop signs, directional signs, corporate identity signs or whatever, are important in determining the overall quality of the urban environment. The Authority will therefore require all signs to have a considered expression of quality throughout the entire development, reflective of the hierarchy of requirements to convey commercial presence, orientation and public information.

6.08.1 Corporate signs

These signs generally denote corporate identity. The Authority would have a preference for carved or relief stone, or alternatively good quality raised lettering in superior materials such as bronze or brass. The signs should be integral with the design of the building and be of an appropriate size -and scale. Illumination should be by means of backlighting or spotlighting. Good examples of appropriate signage can be found in the existing IFSC buildings.

6.08.2 Tenant/Occupant signs

These signs can denote the presence of multiple tenants in a given block and should be designed as an integrated whole. A multiplicity of different tenant signs is not acceptable. Signs should be on quality materials fixed to the building entrance, lobby, or at an approach to the building. Lighting should be discreet.

6.08.3 Retail signs

These can consist of fascia signs, projecting signs, window signs, menu signs, etc. The Authority's objective is to ensure a non-proliferation of signage so that individual premises can be readily identified and that signs do not detract from the architectural qualities of the retail premises. Lettering should be of high quality in good materials and should be custom-designed for their surroundings. Lighting should be discreet with backlighting or spotlighting used. Plastic box signs, either illuminated or otherwise, are not permissible. Roller shutters, where required, must be transparent and located on the inside face of the glass shop front.

6.08.4 Street signs

All street name signs must conform with the Dublin Corporation standard, including font, proportion, colour and postal code.

6.08.5 Directional signs

These should be appropriately located so as to avoid clutter or competition with other signs. They must be at an appropriate height to ensure legibility and pedestrian safety, and they must accord with national and international conventional codes.

6.08.6 Public information/cultural sign's, etc.

The Authority will encourage the provision of such signs provided they do not clutter the streetscape, are well designed, fulfill their primary function, and are not primarily advertising signs.

6.08.7 Temporary signs

Examples of these would include seasonal signs (Christmas and festivals), short-term promotions, building sites, warning signs, flags, banners, etc. These signs must not obstruct public routes and must be agreed with CHDDA or the Management Company prior to erection. This agreement should include the date of dismantling. The design should be of high quality.

6.08.8 Regulatory or warning signs

Examples of these are 'No Parking' signs, directional signs 'Left Turn Only' etc. These must conform to national prototypes and should be of a scale appropriate to their surroundings and have night-time visibility. Designers are asked to be conscious of the night-time appearance of signs and also to consider how they can contribute to a feeling of security throughout the redevelopment.

PLANNING SCHEME

6.09 Key elements:

6.09.1 Existing streets

The Authority will conserve the existing street pattern in the areas and seek the improvement of the streets with appropriate landscaping and street lighting.

6.09.2 Conservation

It will require the conservation of all the structures or elements of those structures of architectural or historic value as listed in paragraphs 6.04.1 to 6.04.12. It will also seek the conservation of elements such as stone street setts and marine furniture. 6.09.3 Water and amenity It will seek to maximise the exploitation of water frontage for amenity purposes.

6.09.4 Heights and street lines

Building heights and street lines shall conform with those shown on the drawings. However in the case of any proposal for a major national institution such as a conference centre in the former national sports centre site, the Authority will reassign heights and street lines to ensure an appropriate urban design approach is taken.

6.09.5 Materials

Materials shall be of good quality with clay brick used as a recurrent material throughout the development.

6.09.6 Architectural design

A high standard of architectural design is required as well as high standards in the design of street furniture, landscaping and signs.