

Economic Development, Planning & International Relations SPC

Brownfield Initiatives Steering Group

First Update on Work Programme

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1. Introduction & Background

The issue of vacant lands, sites and buildings has been a matter of concern for the Planning and Economic Development Department for some time. Indeed the City Development Plan (2011-2017) now contains a number of policies to make the best use of all urban land, in order to create a compact, sustainable city supported by quality physical and social infrastructure. Since the adoption of the City Development Plan a number of Departments within the City Council have been involved in a variety of brownfield/vacant land initiatives. In addition, the Planning and Economic Development Department has been engaged in a European Brownfield Project, which resulted in a pledge at Seville (2012) to integrate brownfield best practice into all Council policy.

At the September meeting of the Economic Development, Planning and International Relations Strategic Policy Committee, it was decided to set up a Steering Group to bring together the various strands relating to vacant land and building, derelict sites and related matters. A Working Group has also been established to coordinate and progress the various initiatives in the City Council. This is the first progress report to the Steering Group setting out brief updates on the various initiatives. There may be other initiatives not listed here but these can be included in future reports.

The members of the Steering Group are as follows:

- Cllr. Mary Freehill (Chair)
- Cllr. Paddy McCartan
- Cllr. Padraig McLoughlin
- Cllr. Criona Ni Dhalaigh
- Jeanette Mair, SPC Member
- Philip Maguire Assistant City Manager
- Brendan Kenny, Assistant City Manager
- Jim Keogan Executive Manager
- Peter Finnegan Executive Manager
- Peter Ayton Housing Executive Manager
- Ali Grehan, City Architect
- David Garvey Chief Valuer
- Rose Kenny, Finance Executive Manager
- Tom Dunne, DIT
- John O'Hara Deputy City Planner
- Lorna Maxwell Senior Executive Officer

- Kieran Rose Senior Planner

The Working Group reporting to the Steering Group comprises Kieran Rose as Project Co-ordinator, with representatives from the Planning, Conservation, Valuers and Public Realm and other Sections of the City Council.

2. Taskforce on Proposed Vacant Land Levy

The Lord Mayors taskforce continues to meet with relevant bodies such as NAMA, Construction Industry Federation, Property Industry Ireland and others to clarify aspects of the levy proposal, address concerns and to build a wider consensus.

“Development land prices triple in less than a year” was the title of an article in the Sunday Business Post (27.10.2013) by Donal Buckley where he wrote that:

“... and with a pick-up in demand for city centre student accommodation and offices, **developers are having to compete again with investors** [my emphasis] who plan to buy and sit on the land in the expectation that they may get a better return than from other types of investment”.

In an article “Housing strategy essential as market moves” in the on-line Daily Business Post (31.10.2013), economist Jim Power analysed the rising house prices and the scarcity of supply in Dublin and concluded that; “While concerns about another bubble look pre-mature at the moment, there is always a possibility that if the market continues to gather momentum, an unsustainable market could become a possibility at some stage.” He recommended that: “For policy makers, now is the time to start thinking about measures that might prevent such an eventuality. The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Oisín Quinn recently sought the introduction of enabling legislation to allow Dublin City Council to introduce a levy in vacant land in the Inner City of Dublin in order to incentivise and accelerate the development of such land. Given that the lack of supply in Dublin is an issue that will become much more real over the coming years, this measure makes eminent sense and should be pursued as a matter of urgency.”

For the purposes of the levy, the proposed definition of vacant land is as follows; Vacant land is zoned development land which has not been developed and does not have Rateable building/s on it (i.e. buildings not capable of occupation).

The economic and competitiveness dimensions of the vacant land levy proposal and other issues in this report could be considered in the current review of the *Economic Action Plan*.

3. Vacant Lands Audit

Dublin City Council has recognised the need for a systematic overview of vacant and underutilised sites and aims to develop a model for mapping and monitoring.

A baseline audit of vacant lands located within the Inner city commenced in August 2013. The area within the canals was divided into 1 km² grids and each grid was surveyed to identify the location of vacant buildings and sites. The survey has been completed and reports including photographs are currently being compiled on all surveyed sites.

The sites are currently being mapped and the survey findings are being analysed to build a composite picture of the nature and extent of vacant lands in the inner city. The analysis involves categorising the sites to distinguish the various types of vacancy and underutilisation which have been identified in the survey, in addition to planning history and ownership.

It is intended to publish the survey in GIS and to trial methods of updating and monitoring. This survey will then be used as the baseline for monitoring progress on all brownfield/vacant lands/buildings.

4. Uses of Vacant Land

Pilot Project of the Public Realm Strategy

This pilot project focuses on the route of the Luas red line, from O'Connell St to Collins Barracks which has high levels of dereliction, vacancy, buildings in need of maintenance and development sites. The Project works in collaboration with stakeholders, owners, Area Management and all Departments of Dublin City Council setting standards of maintenance, cleanliness and appearance with a view to improving the overall public realm.

The chosen route has a broad range of problems ranging from, badly maintained premises, unused buildings and sites, derelict buildings, development sites and sites with temporary boundary treatments currently detracting from rather than contributing to the street scape. It also has a number of heritage buildings and tourist attractions which remain undervalued and are not easily accessed.

The aim of this project are to advance small interventions and low cost initiatives to achieve improvements to the street scape and identify models and initiatives which are scalable in the city.

Progress to date includes:

A photographic study and mapping of the route

Identification of buildings or sites in need of interventions, ranging from improved maintenance , painting, advise with regard to conservation or legal action

Development of a guidance document for inspection and maintenance standards of buildings for owners and tenants with a view to improving how they present to the street, refinishing , painting, removal of buglia, clear gutters and drains etc..

Direct engagement with key stakeholders to upgrade their premises or making planning applications with regard to improved or permanent boundary treatment.

Trial of Moss Wall as a possible remedy for badly presented buildings or hoarding.

Supported the development of proposal for a key site at Church Street to bring it into public use and provide a tourism interest point.

Proposal for a historic/cultural walking route in the area to draw tourists along the route and highlight the historic value of the area from Capel St to Smithfield in particular and on to the establish tourist attractions on the route

Engagement with Internal Departments in control of properties on the route.

Review of City Council owned properties set on 99 year licences with regard to maintenance responsibilities.

Other Initiatives

- 40 allotments have recently been provided at Grattan Park, Inchicore
- Allotments and park at Bridgefoot Street at an advanced stage
- Pocket Park on vacant site in Thomas Street at an advanced stage

- Land at Cherry Orchard Green. Reserved for housing. Site has been developed as a community garden and 50 allotments. Developed about three years ago and is now managed by Ballyfermot / Chapelizod Partnership. A Fetac Level 4 horticultural course involving 20 local young people will commence shortly and be based on the site.

- Site at Springvale, Chapelizod. Reserved mainly for housing. Work is nearing completion of the development of 36 allotments on the site. Allotments will be brought into use in the next few weeks.

- Dublin House project: A project to make vacant Council-owned sites available in central districts to private groups to design and build their own homes. A tender process is being developed for an initial pilot site on Fishamble St., with a target of issuing the tender this year.

- Civic Spine; collating and mapping information on vacant sites near or on the route of the Civic Spine, as part of the Parnell Square Cultural Quarter project with a view to identifying ways in which the cultural regeneration project can be leveraged to lift the value or attractiveness for redevelopment of these sites.

- Granby Park project involved securing the site for use, assisting with facilitating funding and providing technical services such as structural inspections and advice to the Park's organisers on technical compliance issues.

5. Uses of Vacant Buildings

Vacant Space Scheme

The Vacant Space scheme was initiated by the Arts Office as a response to calls by the creative sectors for support in accessing vacant properties in the Dublin area.

Initially the programme offered a series of seminars and workshops where artists and organisations came together to share their experiences. The first of these seminars took place in Eblana House, one of the first spaces to be offered to artists under the scheme.

Subsequently an additional nine spaces were placed on offer which included a mix of DCC properties, and properties available from Letting Agents and Developers. All properties that were entered into the scheme to date have either been let to artists or arts organisations, have been occupied or were taken of the market.

While the programme has continued to grow over the last two years a number of key issues have arisen that now form part of the provision, process, & procedures adopted as part of the ongoing scheme. The areas that are currently addressed through the programme are:

- Spaces: The Arts Office currently offers Units 3, 4 James Joyce Street (former retail units) as a mechanism for enabling artist to gain experience and test ideas in relation to the use of vacant spaces.
- Advice and support: The Arts Office offers an on line FAQ sheet for artists and creative's answering questions in regard to the scheme and in relation to the general occupation of vacant space.

As part of an Arts Council Grant the Arts Office is also preparing a toolkit for artists that will extend the support offered via the FAQ sheet.

- Arts Office and Planning and Economic Development Department: In regard to DCC properties the Arts Office, in partnership with the Planning and Economic Department operates a system of public call out, viewing day, application and interview, followed by the issuing of a licence. In regard to space offered by Letting Agents and Developers the Arts Office acts as a facilitator only, any negotiations for the use of space are undertaken between the Artist and the owner.

Future potential of Vacant Space Scheme:

- The current system offers a model for the disposal of suitable DCC properties that enhance the ability of the artistic and creative community to continue to contribute in a sustainable way to Dublin's Cultural growth. The adoption of a unified system across the city council could allow the city to provide a strategic response to the provision of Cultural infrastructure across the city.
- As the economy recovers the Arts Office is keen to ensure that Cultural and Artistic space forms a realistic part of the planning for Dublin's Cultural and Economic infrastructure. This specifically includes awareness and provision for affordable spaces for artists, the transition from short term to long term occupation of spaces as part of a sustainable process, and the introduction of suitable supports for the cultural and creative use of space.
- This system also offers a template for the disposal and temporary occupation of DCC properties to other interested parties.

South Georgian Core Project

Following a year-long consultation with various interested groups and stakeholders a report was published in July 2013.

The report identified 47 specific recommendations. A number of important recommendations have already been implemented. This includes the exemption from financial contributions when planning permission is granted for a “change of use” from residential to commercial (or vice versa) of a protected structure. In a typical Georgian property this may have cost up to €60,000.

The 47 recommendations should be seen as part of a holistic approach to a “big picture” story about city making and civic leadership. In this regard the report endeavoured to set out a “Vision” for the South Georgian Core.

These include firstly, the full Georgian home, “The Georgian Townhouse”, secondly the state of the art Georgian apartment - “The Georgian Penthouse Duplex”, “Georgian Piano Nobile Duplex” and “The Georgian City Garden Duplex”, thirdly “The Georgian Boutique Hotel” and fourthly “The Georgian Executive Residential Office Suite”.

Taken together, these four typologies of commercial and residential refurbishment/development have the potential to unify business interests, conservation experts, civic society and cultural/tourism promoters around a shared convincing and sustainable urban vision for the South Georgian Core. Just as a heritage vision should excite business interests, an economic vision should excite conservation enthusiasts.

There are also significant opportunities to feed into the current City Council branding strategy. Dublin’s Georgian “Redbricks” along Upper Mount Street may in time become the fashionable equivalent of the “Brownstones” New York.

If successful, the residential revitalisation of the South Georgian core may over time permeate to more challenging areas of the inner city, providing an economic rationale for investment to consolidate and reuse vulnerable historic fabric in places like Thomas Street, and the North inner city.

The report concludes that “Any vision for the South Georgian Core must capture the excitement and imagination of the future as much as it celebrates and protects the ambitions and achievements of the past”.

Next steps: The commissioning of an Architectural / Building Conservation Study that will "scenario test" various sub division options of a typical Georgian property on Fitzwilliam Square. This will provide greater conservation, planning and building regulation guidance to potential home owners.

Consider a number of proposed land use zoning amendments that will require a variation to the Dublin City Development Plan.

An important recommendation to Government has recently being accepted under the recent Finance Bill, namely that South Georgian Core (North Georgian Core also) should be afforded the same tax benefits as those recently introduced under the **Living City Initiative** whereby owners can claim tax relief on refurbishment schemes at the rate of 10 per cent a year for 10 years – providing they keep using a house as their principal private residence. Carry out necessary studies to implement this initiative.

Buildings at Risk

Since the 2000 Act, the Planning and Development Dept have a Buildings at Risk Register (BAR). At present there are over 100 Protected Structures on it. We have just completed a survey all the buildings inside the Canal Ring, mainly in postcodes 1 and 2, with the north inner city having the biggest complement of buildings. Arising from the recent survey, we are prioritising 18 buildings for urgent enforcement action.

Most of the buildings on the BAR are vacant and in poor condition. To protect the fabric of the buildings “weathering” them, i.e., keeping out the rain, is always the first requirement. Facilitating new uses forms an important part of that restoration/rejuvenation process.

Next Steps: Continue work on the Register and report to next Steering Group meeting.

The Digital Hub

The Digital Hub has 9 acres of brownfield sites on both sides of Thomas Street close to St James’ Gate. DHDA have a 10 year development plan in place that will target investment through sale of some sections of the site to fund development on others.

In the interim DHDA and DCC have signed a Memorandum of Agreement under section 4 (1)f of the Planning and Development Act 2000. This agreement allows for the temporary use of the buildings on the Digital Hub site for a maximum of 2 years for designated uses. DHDA welcomes this MOA however it should be noted that significant investment by DHDA in the material structure of the buildings would be required. Elsewhere on the site DHDA & DCC are looking at an option for a “pocket park” on one of the vacant sites. This would be a community project that a private enterprise will building in conjunction with the probation service and manage with the community.

6. EU Projects and Research

USEact Project

Dublin City Council is one of 10 Partner cities/Authorities engaged in the USEact Project (Urban Sustainable Environmental Action) with the city of Naples as the lead partner.

The 10 Partners are:

- City of Naples - Italy
- Baia Mare - Romania
- City of Barakaldo - Spain
- Buckinghamshire Business First - UK
- City of Dublin - Ireland
- Riga Region - Latvia
- Ostfold County - Norway
- City of Trieste - Italy
- City of Viladecans - Spain
- City of Nitra - Slovak Republic

The focus of the USEAct project: linking “urban growth management” policy, with high quality intervention to reuse urban areas and buildings.

The general scope and aim of the USEAct project can be summarized as follows: detecting how to achieve opportunities for people and businesses to settle, in a sustainable way, in existing urban areas, without further “land take”.

This target is expected to be met through integrated policies and tools aimed at improving the “urban growth management” planning framework coupled with implementable, sustainable urban “interventions” for the re-use of underutilized, vacant or abandoned areas of land and existing settlements, both in historic districts and more recently built areas.

Such an approach is targeted at confronting the obsolescence of urban areas and sustaining the “urban change”, and through city recycling, also improving the city’s environmental, social, economic sustainability, to provide more urban quality to urban communities and, at the same time support the local economy in the short and long-term, to help overcome the effects of the current down-turn.

In terms of the next step, DCC will be attending the National Training Seminar in London on the 18th & 19th November, primarily to discuss the Local Action Plan preparation process.

The project is in its “Implementation Phase” and the next USEAct Meeting (with fellow partners) is scheduled for February 2014 in Trieste, Italy (TBC). The theme for that particular workshop is likely to be “Interventions to reuse urban areas: management, partnerships, funding, functions.”

UCD Study: Urban Regeneration Policies and Techniques

The School of Spatial Planning at UCD were commissioned by DCC to carry out a study on urban regeneration policies and techniques in 3 main areas:

1. An evaluation of the role of property taxation incentives in Dublin area over the past 25 years.
2. An analysis of existing urban policy mechanisms dealing with regeneration and derelict sites in Dublin.

3. International policies and mechanisms for dealing with brownfield regeneration.

Pilot Project Dublin Safe City Programme

In February 2013, Dublin City formally committed to the UN Women Safe City Global Programme. The programme focuses on devising innovative approaches to reducing or eliminating violence against women and girls in public spaces, including on public transport. Research shows that vacant land and buildings, dereliction, and neglected buildings increase peoples sense of insecurity on the streets. This deters footfall and makes an area less attractive for business and investment so a negative cycle is put in place. There are synergies between this project and the Pilot Project of the Public Realm Strategy set out above as they focus on the same area, the LUAS red line.

A scoping study for the Dublin Safe City Programme will commence in November 2013 and conclude in early 2014. The objective of the scoping study will be to determine the prevalence and nature of sexual harassment and violence on the LUAS red line from Heuston to Abbey St and in the public spaces in the immediate vicinity of the line and stops. The findings of the scoping study will inform a site for intervention as well as the design of an intervention to address the issue of safe public spaces for women and girls. A strong monitoring and evaluation element will be built into the design and implementation of the project.

Your Dublin, Your Voice

Launched in October 2010, *Your Dublin, Your Voice* is an initiative of the four Dublin local authorities that gives Dubliners and visitors alike a unique opportunity to provide opinions and views on what they love, like and would be glad to see improved in the capital region. It seeks feedback and suggestions, via online surveys, on a range of issues that impact on quality of life in Dublin. *Your Dublin, Your Voice* is an effective mechanism for public sector decision makers to engage with citizens and others in order to drive change for the region. Some 4,000 members, representing all backgrounds, over 60 nationalities have registered on the panel since it was launched.

Previous surveys have gathered opinion on a variety of issues of relevance to the city including general perceptions of Dublin as a place to live, work, study and visit; perceptions of public safety; family friendly living in the city. The response rate to surveys has been robust and allows for analysis by various demographic characteristics such as gender, age, employment status, nationality, presence of children in the household and area of residence.

Policy specific questions can be inserted into surveys and the issue of vacant / unused land and buildings would be well-suited to the Your Dublin, Your Voice tool. One question might ask respondents to agree / disagree with the concept; another might ask respondents to tick what the percentage levy might be. The YDYYV panel are also traditionally very responsive to open-ended questions. The next YDYYV survey is planned for the end of November, with initial results available from mid-December.

Next Steps: Develop questions relative to the remit of the Steering Group, include in next survey, and report to Steering group.