PARNELL SQUARE CULTURAL QUARTER

A Catalyst for Renewal and Growth Along the Civic Spine

Vision Document
April 2013
A New Vision for Dublin
Dublin is many cities at once, its many identities layered on top of each other, all drawn onto the same map; a tech hub, a UNESCO city of literature, a cultural powerhouse, a thousand-year-old capital of a state a hundred years young. It is a city that thrives on stories and now Dublin is writing a new story.

We are creating a dynamic cultural quarter in the heart of the city at Parnell Square. This bold and visionary project will fulfil the City’s ambitions for a ‘Civic Spine’ connecting the capital’s key historic places. It will be a new public landmark; a destination that will inspire physical and economic renewal; aspire to the ethos of interculturalism; a place for all to meet, learn, create and exchange.

Parnell Square is the first and finest of Dublin's Georgian Squares and a place where Ireland's independence is celebrated. The area has a rich and important history; its philanthropic origins underpinned the growth of Georgian Dublin. Today, as home to national and international institutions, it is identified in the City’s Development Plan as a fitting place to create a vibrant cultural quarter.

A new City Library will be built beside the existing renowned Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane. These will anchor a range of complementary creative experiences – from music to media – all connected by a new civic plaza. This will be a public place, an opportunity for everyone to engage and participate in the many strands of culture that are fundamental to the city. There will be an emphasis on facilities and support for young people. It will be an opportunity for personal transformation, a dynamic place of integration and exchange. This new destination will draw Dubliners and visitors of all ages and interests. The streets around will be revitalised by new footfall, new ideas and new conversations, all inspiring new opportunities.

In the tradition of philanthropy in which Parnell Square was developed in the 18th Century, this new project is being developed by Dublin City Council in association with private funding partners. Kennedy Wilson have undertaken to provide seed financing for the initial stages of the project and will lead the campaign to raise the philanthropic funding required to complete the construction work.

The new complex will be a fusion of contemporary and historic architecture, a screen of fine period rooms through which you will pass into outstanding free flowing light filled spaces. Located on the elevated north side of the Square, its south facing rooms will enjoy breathtaking views across the city to the Dublin Mountains.

This is just the start of the vision. The consultation process to explore what this place can be is just beginning.
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NOTE: Images of contemporary buildings are indicative and for reference only. No architectural designs have yet been commissioned for the Cultural Quarter.
Reactivating the Civic Spine

The Civic Spine which connects the key places in the city centre
Parnell Square

- Trinity College
- The GPO
- College Green
- Grafton Street
- Henry Street
- Dublin Castle & City Hall
- National College of Art and Design
- Christchurch

On to Grangegorman
On to the Digital Hub, Guinness Storehouse, Heuston and IMMA

North
A Symbolic Place
Parnell Square has great significance in the ceremonial and civic life of the city.

It is home to the Garden of Remembrance, the national site commemorating the 1916 Easter Rising which led to the foundation of the Irish State. It is the traditional starting point for all of the most important processions in the city. And it is the northern point of the 'Civic Spine', the route connecting the network of the city’s most historic civic places.

The Civic Spine connects north-south across the River Liffey. Its southern point is Christchurch and Dublin Castle, which mark the heart of the medieval city. The route moves east through College Green, witness to many historic events since Viking times, then crosses north over the river and up O’Connell Street to Parnell Square. O’Connell Street has in modern times been for many the heart of the city, the scene of the 1916 Easter Rising.

Parnell Square was once the most fashionable address in the Georgian city. It is familiar to many today as the place where the struggle for independence is commemorated annually and as the starting point for the city’s biggest processions, from peaceful demonstrations to the St. Patrick’s Day Parade.
Connecting the Civic Spine

Map showing the Civic Spine as identified in Dublin’s Public Realm Strategy with the “Dubline” public realm route to the south and the Parnell Square Cultural Quarter to the north.
Parnell Square Cultural Quarter is in a strategic location amongst a matrix of existing and proposed social and cultural developments. It will mark the midpoint on a route connecting Trinity College and the new DIT campus at Grangegorman, connected by the new Luas BXD line. Other projects nearby which will benefit from this major new destination include the Dominick Street housing regeneration and the planned regeneration of the City Markets.

Dublin’s third level institutions actively pursue ways to engage openly with city stakeholders as a means to further research and learning. Located on the route between Trinity College Dublin and Grangegorman (it is a 15 minute walk or a short Luas ride to each of them), the Cultural Quarter will be an important link between these academic institutions and the wider urban community.

The Civic Spine, along with the Liffey Quays, is the premier public space in Dublin’s development policies.

Redeveloping Parnell Square as a dynamic cultural quarter anchoring the Civic Spine, will create a major new destination, connect existing social and cultural experiences and give momentum to development opportunities waiting to happen. Along the Spine lie the Grafton and Henry Street prime retail areas, major cultural and tourism destinations, the important third level institutions of Trinity, NCAD and the new DIT campus at Grangegorman. A 21st century City Library is the key project of the Dublin City Public Libraries development plan. Building it adjacent to the Hugh Lane Gallery on Parnell Square as the anchor to a new cultural quarter creates a powerful place to connect this chain of destinations.

The project will complement other developments underway along the route. The ‘DubLine’ project initiated recently by Fáilte Ireland aims to transform the public realm from College Green to Christchurch and extending west to the successful Guinness Storehouse, Heuston and Kilmainham. The re-planning and re-landscaping of O’Connell Street has seen it enhanced as a civic boulevard, nevertheless, significant development opportunity remains. The revitalised Parnell Square will complete the Spine at its northern end and will extend it north to the new Dublin Institute of Technology campus at Grangegorman.

This bold and visionary project will act as a catalyst for regeneration and be a significant chapter marker connecting the streets, parks and squares of the north inner city. It will draw Dubliners and visitors of all ages in new directions, transforming the streets around with new footfall and new conversations, all creating new business opportunities.
A Historic Place
Parnell Square is the earliest, and regarded by many as the finest, of Dublin’s Georgian Squares. It was created at a time when developers, entrepreneurs and improvers drew their dreams on maps and sought to create great civic spaces.

Its significance in Dublin’s history predates the Georgian period. Previous excavations have uncovered burials believed to be from the battle of Clontarf, which was fought nearby in 1014.

Parnell Square is a place of birth and rebirth and philanthropy has always been at its heart. In 1757 Dr. Bartholomew Mosse built Britain and Ireland’s first public maternity hospital here. Mosse financed the hospital through money raised from the wealthy patrons of his adjoining ‘Pleasure Gardens’ developed earlier in 1750. Fashionable people were drawn to the area, building grand houses around the Gardens. The building of the Square was completed in 1785.

Today the Square is home to Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, which houses one of Ireland’s foremost collections of modern and contemporary art. The original collection, donated by the Gallery’s founder Sir Hugh Lane in 1908, has now grown to include over 2000 artworks, ranging from the Impressionist masterpieces of Manet, Monet, Renoir and Degas to works by leading national and international contemporary artists. The Hugh Lane’s collection was further enhanced with the 1998 acquisition of the entire contents of Francis Bacon’s Studio, donated by Bacon’s sole heir John Edwards. The Gallery’s wide range of activities both within and outside the Gallery includes an annual programme of lectures given by artists, philosophers and art historians. A lively education and outreach programme has forged strong links with local school and community groups with activities ranging from Kids Club workshops, adult education courses and the ever-popular Sunday lecture series.
A Diverse Place
We know that diversity in communities brings strength and opportunity. The area around Parnell Square is a place of variety and contrast.

The area around Parnell Square has the most intercultural and the highest migrant and ‘New Irish’ population in the city, with 40% and 60% of residents born outside Ireland. This has brought significant ‘diversity advantage’ to the area while also creating new challenges for social cohesion and community engagement. It is home to one of the country’s most prestigious secondary schools yet most of the primary schools are classified as disadvantaged. Pockets of extreme levels of unemployment sit side by side areas of relative affluence.

Parnell Square is well served by public transport, soon to be further enhanced by new LUAS line. The main shopping district around Henry Street is a 5 minute walk from the Square - an area which has also seen ethnic restaurants and shops spring up amongst the traditional vendors of Moore Street, a quintessential Dublin market that is over three hundred years old.

In addition to Dublin City Gallery, the buildings on Parnell Square house a rich spectrum of uses, from the historic Rotunda maternity hospital, trade union headquarters, offices and apartments, restaurants and hotels, to the renowned Gate Theatre and the Abbey Presbyterian Church which hosts Sunday gospel choir services.

Dublin’s Central Library, in the nearby Ilac shopping centre on Henry Street, is popular and well used despite its cramped and outdated home. With over 500,000 visits a year it is highly valued and enriches the lives of people from across the city. While examining potential sites for a City Library, Dublin City Council has been committed to the principle of siting it in the north inner city, highly accessible and building on this strong user community.
The City Library, a major new destination and both anchor and platform for a range of new cultural places with shared facilities

Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane

Major new south-facing pedestrianised plaza for informal gathering, public events and outdoor performances

Route north towards Grangegorman
Widening footpaths on the east side of the square will create more space for walking and lingering and create opportunities for properties to have activities on the street.

Route south on the Civic Spine along O’Connell Street towards College Green and the Dubline.
The Site Plan

The cornerstone: a City Library, a model of 21st century best practice, built within the former Coláiste Mhuire buildings. A cluster of public activities such as a design centre and an inter-cultural hub will make this an integrated place to learn, create and participate.

Dublin’s City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, a powerful place for contemporary art with free admission

Workshop spaces, rehearsal rooms and study areas in 20 & 21 Parnell Square, shared by the facilities

Irish Writer’s Centre

The Dublin Writer’s Museum

Re-landscaping of the eastern and western sides of the square with widened paths and new trees will improve pedestrian access and safety while maintaining traffic flows

Fully or partially pedestrianising Parnell Square north will create a new plaza for events and activities related to the cultural facilities
The Parnell Square cultural space is an ambitious project encompassing places for literature, interculturalism, visual arts, music, media and design.

It will create a new home for the City Library beside the existing Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, which will anchor a cluster of diverse new cultural experiences.

It will be an inclusive place, open and available to anyone who wants to learn about or participate in Dublin’s culture and it will help foster new creativity before an international audience. It will welcome young people, providing unique facilities and support for organising events, getting together and doing creative development work. The cultural venues will benefit from shared facilities, such as an auditorium, exhibition and working spaces, of a quality which would not be available if working in isolation.

The impact on the immediate area will be profound. The cultural space will help to kick-start new cultural ventures which will have the opportunity to seed in surrounding properties. It will be a new destination in the city activating the square with new life. It will bring footfall and open up business opportunities, enhancing social inclusion, changing perceptions and lifting values.

Traffic in the area will be significantly reduced allowing more and better space for pedestrians, particularly on the south and west facing sides of the Square. Here, people will be able to stop to enjoy this new public space in the heart of the city.
A Day in the Life

8:00am

The start of the day and this is a popular place for business breakfast meetings in rooms looking over the city. Commuters pop in to read papers over coffee and check out a loan.

10:00pm

A band arrives to use a rehearsal space. They’ll be on stage tomorrow in the public plaza, a key venue for the annual North Side Music Festival.

6:00pm

Things get busy in the café again as people meet up for something to eat before going on to one of the nearby theatre performances.

8:00pm

The Dublin Film Festival will be launching shortly in the panoramic top floor events space. The gallery space has been transformed into a black box for screening new film shorts.

7:00pm

There’s a quieter feel now as people with no other time in the day come to browse. A community meeting is being held by the Dublin Chinese New Year Festival to plan a float with St Patrick’s Day Fusion Group.
There’s a great buzz in the foyer as the first groups of school kids arrive to use the activity areas in the Library and Gallery.

10:00am

The innovation, skills and language centre is an invaluable resource for people seeking new work opportunities.

11:00am

A busy lunch time in the plaza café with a performance by an African drumming group. The IMPAC book award is being launched in the main auditorium and will be broadcast by national media later.

1:00pm

Participants are arriving for a design workshop co-hosted by DIT and NCAD in third floor gallery.

2:00pm

Teenagers fill the homework club tables, multi media and gaming areas – a mix of social and learning space.

4:00pm
A Place to Learn, Create and Participate
Over 11,000sqm of cultural space will be provided on Parnell Square in a mix of new and renovated buildings.

These spaces will include:

- Contemporary library spaces for reading, listening, watching, playing, researching or thinking
- Multi-media learning suites for languages and skills
- Spaces for special collections of cultural archive material, such as an archive of Dublin theatres
- An Innovation Hub where start-up businesses and projects can find the resources they need to take their first steps, including workstations
- An Intercultural Hub where a focused Intercultural Centre acts as a national and city wide space and resource for information, interconnection, assistance and inclusion.
- A City Civic Ceremonial Space: A new venue providing space for the emerging and evolving demand in which any individual or community can access and use as a ceremonial space
- Meeting areas and workshop rooms for use by businesses, organisations and community groups
- Exhibition spaces, both new spaces and the existing gallery spaces of Dublin City Gallery
- Young people’s learning, activity and recreational areas for creating music, theatre, art, media and gaming
- Facilities to support organising and promoting festivals and events
- Public rooms providing a dramatic new civic venue for events
- A StoryHouse – a place for writers and readers, a creative commons for emerging and established writers to include residencies at civic, national and international levels of excellence and engagement.
- Intimate spaces for public participation with literature via a hearth space and Spoken Word Hub
- 200-seat auditorium with recording facilities suitable for live spoken word and music recordings
- A hub for Dublin’s City of Literature, connecting Dublin to its peers in the UNESCO network of Creative Cities of Literature, Film, Music, Design, Crafts and Folk Art, Media Arts and Gastronomy

All of these facilities will be shared by the key stakeholders operating the centre and will be open to all users and visitors. There will be an invitation to all to join in, to learn, to make and to participate.

“The City Library will be a window on the world of knowledge and culture, a centre of learning and literature, a commune of research and reading and a hub of ideas and creativity.

It will inspire and excite, welcome and include with collections, connections, places, services and programmes for learners, readers, researchers, for children and families, for all citizens. It will be Dublin city’s central, open and inclusive venue nurturing the development of critical thinking and an informed citizenry.

It will be at the heart of the literary life of the capital.....It will showcase Dublin’s unique literary heritage and promote its dynamic contemporary scene. It will celebrate writers and writing.

It will be a meeting place both for people and for ideas – a storyhouse. It will exemplify the key qualities of the “new library”, a place that is always ready to change, a dynamic and constantly evolving space, a library of temporary spaces, meeting spaces, different places. It will imbue in its users a sense of ownership and a sense that they, the citizens, will develop the library through the events that happen there.”

from What is the Stars, Dublin City Public Libraries Development Plan 2012 – 2016
A Rediscovered Public Square
Transforming Parnell Square as an attractive public space at the northern tip of the Civic Spine is central to this vision.

Parnell Square is a magnificent urban space with fine proportions, palatial historic buildings and elevated views overlooking the city. As with other public realm initiatives along the Civic Spine, a number of key interventions can restore the Square for people.

This cultural development includes an expansive plaza along the length of northern side of the Square. This plaza will connect the terrace of public buildings and provide a versatile space for outdoor performances, informal gatherings, installations and markets.

The work done on O’Connell Street has shown how carefully re-planning and managing traffic can dramatically change the qualities of a street - making space for seating, strolling and browsing. The western and eastern sides of the Square can be similarly greatly improved with wide footpaths, cycleways and tree planting.

The Civic Spine can be extended north towards the new DIT campus at Grangegorman by physically enhancing the streetscape. There is a timely opportunity also to develop a master plan with the Rotunda Hospital which reconnects the historic buildings with the historic gardens at the heart of Parnell Square and restores the formal connection between Charlemont House (Dublin City Gallery) and the original Rotunda complex.

The proposal includes re-landscaping the public realm at the northern end of Parnell Square, calming or removing vehicular traffic and making space for the life of the cultural venues to spill outside. The public realm will be where the new facilities connect, where people will come together and where ideas will be exchanged.

The Square’s many stakeholders will have a role in its reinvention. The Rotunda Hospital is the key stakeholder with the ability to transform the centre of the Square. Other property owners on the Square will benefit from increased demand for social and recreational facilities or additional cultural uses.

The diagrams below show the dimensions of Parnell Square North compared with Meeting House Square in Temple Bar and Grand Canal Square in Dublin 2.

The diagrams below show the dimensions of Parnell Square North compared with Meeting House Square in Temple Bar and Grand Canal Square in Dublin 2.
Architecture Unique to Dublin
The Coláiste Mhuire site offers an opportunity to provide the contemporary library service which the new City Library will need. Consisting of six inter-connected Georgian houses, the large site to the rear allows for the development of a contemporary library space. The Georgian buildings will hold special collections, meeting spaces, work spaces and offices. On an elevated site looking south across the city and fronted by a large public plaza, there are many ways in which the City Library can be given a distinctive entrance.

Contemporary architecture of quality, combined with fine historic buildings overlooking the heart of the city, will be the setting for the expanded and reinvigorated activities of the Cultural Quarter.

The adaptation and restoration of the Georgian architecture and the important historic context of Parnell Square will demand complementary new architecture of outstanding design quality to fulfil the brief. Contemporary architecture can sit well in historic places when designed with skill, innovation and sound judgement.

A contemporary City Library requires a combination of large open spaces for general reading and lending areas and more intimately-scaled spaces for study areas, special collections and working spaces. The former Coláiste Mhuire comprises a terrace of six large Georgian buildings with a large site to the rear - ideal for providing this combination of large, open space with intimately-scaled rooms. The historic buildings will be fully integrated into the life of the place and creatively adapted and restored for new uses.

A bold architectural design that respects and embraces the contrast will be what makes this new place special – at once welcoming in its familiarity and exciting in its drama.

Parnell Square’s elevated location looking south over the city centre to the Dublin mountains will make these buildings a spectacular setting for uses of the cultural quarter – a dramatic backdrop for activities ranging from everyday studying or working to special events.
Implementation
Design and Planning
Preparations have already started on the project. The work programme is being developed and the key target dates are as follows:

- Appoint a design team 2013
- Submit a planning application 2014
- Start construction Autumn 2015
- Open the new cultural complex Christmas 2017

These target dates are subject to the planning process.

We have established a Project Management Team and Cultural Group to develop and implement the project strategy. Consultation with the many relevant stakeholders will be central to this work. We want to ensure that the strategy is well coordinated with the existing infrastructure of the city and meets the needs of local communities, as well as national and international needs and ambitions.

We have been developing technical briefs for the cultural facilities and the city library. On completion there will be a competitive process to select a design team with a proven track record in designing world class cultural buildings. This team will be multi-disciplinary, including architects, conservation specialists, landscape architects, engineers and cost consultants. Once appointed, the design team will work with us in developing architectural and landscape designs for the Quarter and delivering the project through design, planning, tender and construction.

Work has commenced assembling the properties to house the new cultural facilities: Nos.23-28 Parnell Square and Nos. 20-21 Parnell Square. Arrangements are being made for the transfer of the former Coláiste Mhuire from the OPW to Dublin City Council. Together with the City Gallery, these will form the consolidated site for the Cultural Quarter.

The capital works for the project are to be financed through private philanthropic funding. An agreement has been reached with the Council’s partners in the development, Kennedy Wilson, for the provision of seed capital to initiate the project to planning application stage. In addition to providing this seed capital, Kennedy Wilson will be leading the further fund raising effort to secure the finances to deliver this exciting initiative and to help manage the project throughout its development.
Participation
The Parnell Square cultural space is an ambitious project; its success will depend on developing a shared understanding of the expectations and needs of all stakeholders.

We are setting out to make a new public landmark; a destination that will inspire physical and economic regeneration along the city's Civic Spine and aspire to the ethos of interculturalism; an open place for all to meet, learn, create and exchange.

Many people will play a part in achieving these aims: community groups, public representatives, cultural organisations, educational institutions, businesses, private and public funders, designers, centre staff, media, opinion formers, commentators, city promoters and more.

This document describes an idea for what this cultural quarter can be and what impact it can have. We will be embarking on a discussion process now to discover more potential in this idea and to define ways delivering on the idea successfully. The discussion will take place in tandem with the commissioning of the design. It will be done through public meetings, one to one meetings and social media.

To be part of these conversations or find out more please get in touch:

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www.dublincity.ie/parnellsquare
Images

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It is a city that thrives on stories and now Dublin is writing a new story. We are creating a dynamic cultural quarter in the heart of the city at Parnell Square. This bold and visionary project will fulfil the City’s ambitions for a ‘Civic Spine’ connecting the capital’s key historic places. It will be a new public landmark; a destination that will inspire physical and economic renewal and aspire to the ethos of interculturalism; a place for all to meet, learn, create and exchange.