

CORK DOCKLANDS

**A publicly-driven approach to sustainable
urban development**

**People Before Profit
Cork Branch
July 2017**



Introduction: An opportunity to address the housing crisis

Cork City Council has begun preparation of Local Area Plans for the Cork City and Tivoli Docklands, currently partly under public ownership and partly owned by private industry.

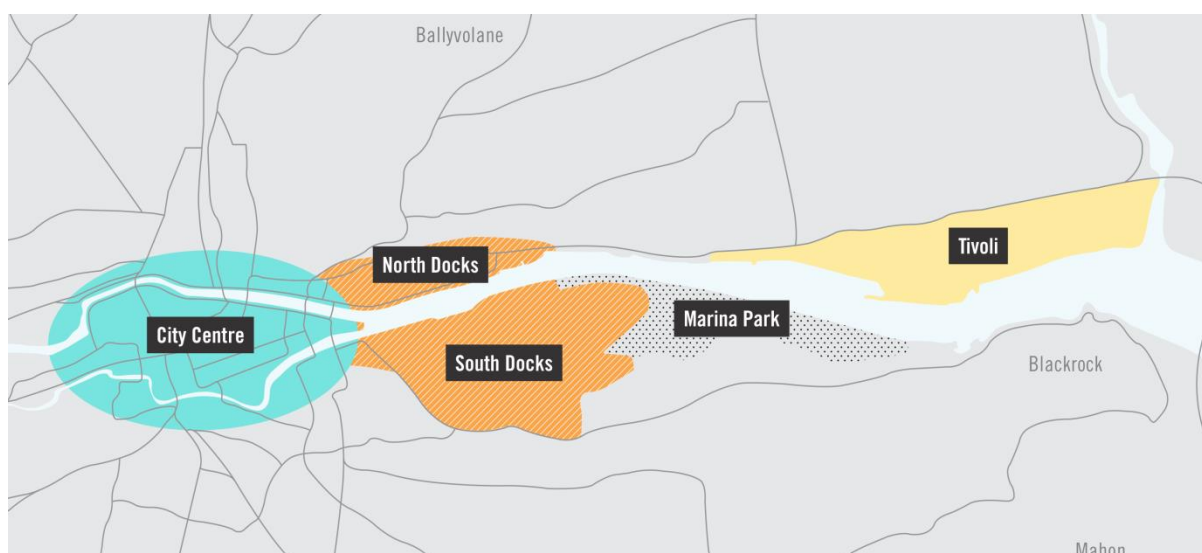
In recent years, urban centres have experienced a hollowing-out as the majority of people can no longer afford to live in quality housing in the areas in which they work. Cork City has the second highest number of vacant housing units in the country – almost 4,300 – while in May average rents had increased by 13.1% year-on-year to €806 per month for a one-bed apartment. As geographer David Harvey writes, '[q]uality of urban life has become a commodity for those with money', to the exclusion of the majority.

Cork City and County face an enormous housing crisis. The social housing waiting list for Cork City has well in excess of 5,000 applicants. There is a real need for **development of public housing on a large scale** to address this crisis. The Docklands project can facilitate the expansion of Cork City, while tackling the housing and homelessness crises, through providing housing that is truly affordable to the majority.

The recent strategy of the Irish Government has been to rely on private developers to address this crisis and to wait for them to develop the required housing. As Minister for Housing, Simon Coveney launched the 'Rebuilding Ireland' housing plan, under which it was planned to effectively transfer large amounts of public cash and land to private developers in the hope that they will build housing at the rate required. Despite these subsidies for the private sector, this has not provided a solution to the crisis.

Under current planning law, private developers deliver 10% of their proposed housing at 'affordable' prices. This model can do little to alleviate the crisis in Cork. We call for the Docklands area to be developed with housing built with public funding and in the public interest, alongside the infrastructure and amenities required to create a vibrant urban environment in which to live and work.

The proposed redevelopment of Cork's Docklands presents an enormous opportunity to address a number of crises in Cork and to develop the built environment of the city based on public need rather than private profit.



The built environment, publicly delivered

As Ireland's housing crisis [persists](#), homelessness among adults in Cork has increased by 28% over the 12 months to March 2017. Radical planning is required to address the needs of a population subject to soaring rents (up 12% in Cork in the year to December 2016) and an expanding social housing list.

Last year, the Irish Government launched the 'Rebuilding Ireland' plan to address the housing crisis. The plan admitted that, 'left to its own devices', the private sector 'would not ensure all households are housed appropriately or at all'. Yet, the Government's response to the housing crisis is to continue to subsidise private, for-profit developers. The existing strategy to develop the Docklands is utterly embedded in this approach – Ann Doherty, Chief Executive of Cork City Council told the *Evening Echo* on 26 June that 'one of the things I would like to see more of is the development of private housing' – which will not deliver affordable housing for the people of Cork. Building office blocks and hotels is far more attractive to private developers than the provision of homes accessible and affordable for all.

While much of the public infrastructure required at the Docklands will be funded using public money, the existing proposal will see private property developers offer for-profit housing to the market at unaffordable prices. In line with the current approach, developers will also receive a public subsidy in the form of reduced development contributions and publicly constructed infrastructure which enables access to privately-built houses. Given the planned large-scale public investment in the Docklands, we suggest that all housing be constructed as part of this public investment, facilitating the public oversight that this entails.



Housing: A human right

As house prices in Cork are out of reach for those on average wages or below (as well as many who earn more than average wage), we would suggest that the large majority of those in need of housing in Cork fall under the category of 'eligible persons' for affordable housing. In light of this need for affordable housing and the extent of the housing waiting list, **we call on Cork City Council to adjust its policy on the Docklands to increase the proportion of affordable housing.**

We do not see the 10% of housing to be provided as social and affordable housing, as per Part V of the Planning and Development Act, as sufficient to deal with the housing crisis in Cork. As the majority of would-be house-buyers in Cork City cannot afford private housing, considerably more than 10% of new housing will need to be social or affordable. The redevelopment of the Cork Docklands offers **a unique opportunity to tackle the housing crisis** through innovative urban planning, with emphasis placed on **sustainable and environmentally-sound development.**

We should learn from the destructive legacy of the last private-developer-led property boom that it is insufficient to allow private developers to take charge of housing delivery. We urge the Council to **remove private developers, who have no interest in public well-being, from the equation** when it comes to the delivery of housing at Cork's Docklands and to develop the area so that it can be used by the majority, regardless of income. The pursuit of profit should not be a factor in the delivery of the basic human right to housing. A not-for-profit housing agency that is democratically accountable and acts in the interest of the public should be established and run by Cork City and County Councils and should hire workers to build and manage the construction of developments such as the Docklands.

Patrick Lethwidge, Deputy CEO of Cork City Council has said that:

If an idea is good enough, money can be found. It can take a long time and sometimes the end result may not be what was initially envisaged but that is no reason not to aim high.

We urge Cork City Council to 'aim high' and develop the Docklands in a sustainable manner. This means developing housing publicly, not privately. If private developers can borrow in order to fund housing development, then so too can the public sector through a number of existing mechanisms.

Public housing development

We call on Cork County Council to purchase any parts of the zoned development land at the Docklands which are not already publicly owned using the provision in section 96 of Part V of the Planning and Development Act at the value of its 'Existing Use', or using other mechanisms, such as Compulsory Purchase Order.

We further call on Cork City Council to manage the development of all housing and infrastructure at the Docklands. Those affected by Cork's housing crisis do not have time to wait for private developers to build housing when they consider it suitably profitable.

We assert that the objective stated in the Local Area Plan to provide 9,500 housing units at the Cork Docks **will not be achieved if development is left to private developers.**

Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements should not be sought as an option for delivering public housing at Cork's Docklands. While councils may consider these schemes to be preferable in the short term as they provide a quick source of funding, such schemes end up costing far more in the long term in order to cover the private sector's profits at the taxpayer's expense. PPP schemes effectively transfer funds from the public to the private sector. The money that the private sector would seek to make on PPP schemes would be better spent on public provision of housing and infrastructure that will benefit users and residents at Cork's Docklands.

Green, sustainable infrastructure

People Before Profit Cork calls for a holistic approach to urban planning, under which development is met with the infrastructure and facilities that future residents and workers in the Docklands will need. If up to 9,500 housing units are to be provided, this will require affordable, properly-funded and well-run public transport for residents. We call for a light-rail system to be developed to link the Docklands with the city and Cork's eastern suburbs. On the northern docks is the existing Cork to Cobh and Midleton railway line, and a railway station should be developed at Tivoli, where capacity for up to 3,000 houses exists.



The Cork Docklands offers a prime opportunity for the development of a light-rail system in Cork, which would connect the City Centre with the Docklands area via Kennedy Quay, Albert Quay and Parnell Place. This would develop and enhance the character of the existing southern quays of the River Lee. This system should be designed to ensure connectivity with a city-wide light-rail system – required urgently as Cork City faces a growing traffic crisis. This light-rail system should also connect the Docklands with the eastern suburbs, such as Blackrock and Mahon.

Improved connectivity across the River Lee is crucial, and new bridges, served by public transport, should be constructed in advance of any housing development to ensure that communities are linked and that future Docklands residents are not socially isolated by a lack of infrastructure and services.

The Docklands should be designed with excellent connectivity for pedestrians throughout. Residents should not need to own a car, and all amenities should be readily accessible on foot. Dedicated safe cycling routes between the Docklands and the City Centre should be available.

Reviving Cork's city centre

A public project that delivers 9,500 units in the Docklands will also transform the city centre. These homes will ensure that the city becomes a **living and breathing space, where enormous artistic potential can be tapped.**

The life of an expanding Cork City should not be limited to commerce and consumerism, and the Docklands redevelopment should be informed by the notion of a common right to the city. This approach can tackle the ghettoization that arises from the displacement from the city of those who can no longer afford spiralling rents and housing prices, with an emphasis on the city as a shared space for all in which to live and work. The urban regeneration required for Cork City must focus on expanding the city's population, so that workers can live where they work, facilitated by **affordable, controlled rents.** The redevelopment project should centre public space for common use and community living.

The Docklands' natural heritage assets, in particular the 4 kilometre waterfront of the Cork Docks, should be a focal point of the redevelopment. The Cork and Tivoli Docklands were identified as sites for 'significant tree planting' under the [2009-2015 Development Plan for Cork City](#). This emphasis on the maximization of the Docklands' natural assets should be incorporated into any new development. The plan further states that '[a]ll areas of the city should have access to nature, parks, public open space and sports facilities within 5-10 minutes of their place of residence/work'.

We fully support such an initiative and recommend that this approach be integrated into the new Docklands development plans.



Tokachi Ecology Park, Japan

A vibrant cultural centre

To enhance the cultural and recreational life of residents and workers in the Docklands, we suggest that public space should be used to provide **community gardens, public parks, walkways and gathering places**, with the riverside location a focus of the planning of public space and amenities.

Central to the plan for the Docklands must be the provision of accessible and affordable facilities where artists can live and work. Cultural spaces and facilities are essential to any community and to the overall life of a city. With the recent relocation of Sample Studios from George's Quay in the city centre to Churchfield and the closure of the Camden Palace community arts centre, artists and cultural workers have increasingly limited facilities within Cork City, greatly jeopardising the vibrant culture of the city itself. The Docklands redevelopment provides an opportunity to revitalise the cultural life of the city through the provision of affordable workspaces and community venues for the production, exhibition and performance of cultural work.



River of Light display, Bournemouth Arts by the Sea Festival, 2015

Conclusion

The well-being of Ireland's next generation and Cork City as a thriving urban centre depends on a well-funded, sustainable, public housing programme, supported by the infrastructure and amenities required for a thriving community. Even the business lobby group IBEC have called for massive public investment in housing, out of fear that businesses will leave Ireland as it becomes too expensive for their workers to live here.

If Cork is to continue to grow and develop as a city, it is essential that public investment in housing takes place. Left to the private sector for development, we are unlikely to see the Docklands built in a sustainable or holistic manner. No modern European city was built without significant public investment. Only through an **ambitious project in the public interest** will the problems of homelessness, unaffordable rents and the housing deficit be solved and a vibrant urban environment in which to live and work be created in its place.