

**To the Chairperson and Members of the
South East Area Committee**

Report on Proposed Works at Merrion Square Park (Tearooms)

Construction of tearooms at Merrion Square Park, including external terrace, kitchen / store, toilets, staff facilities, maintenance, plant / storage areas, public accessible toilets and baby changing facilities, external lighting and alterations to existing fence and steps to the playground.

Dublin City Council Community Recreation and Economic Services has commissioned Bucholz McEvoy Architects to develop a design for an elegant, contemporary tearooms with careful consideration of placement, scale, materials and proportions and its relationship to the historic Merrion Square Park. This project is being developed in the context of the objectives identified for the park in the *Conservation & Management Plan* (Howley Hayes Architects 2014). A new tearoom in Merrion Square Park would support and enhance the amenity value of the park for both locals and visitors alike - an open and inviting building, providing accommodation for refreshment facilities and accessible toilet facilities, supporting the hosting of cultural events in the park.

Located in Merrion Square Park, a fine Georgian garden square, the design of the tearooms is carefully woven into its context in order to minimise its visual impact. In the north-west of the park closest to the city centre and the National Gallery, the tearooms will be integrated into the sloping topography, under the canopy of existing mature trees. The footprint of the building has been determined by the location of existing trees and by maximising the number of trees in good condition to be retained. A survey of the existing trees has been undertaken and relative condition of each tree identified.

The tearooms are positioned to engage with the existing promenade (the original perimeter path) and mature trees on the site, highlighting the unique qualities of the park, enhancing the edge of the promenade and connecting the street side to the lower levels of the park. It is located off the promenade, adjacent to the existing playground. Public access to the tearooms is facilitated from a number of directions – from the ‘promenade’ by steps and an accessible ramp under the canopy of mature trees, from the playground to the west, and from the path to the east leading to the centre of Merrion Square Park.

The tearooms (315m²) will include a dining area, foyer space, kitchen, staff areas, toilet facilities and associated ancillary areas. The dining area will be a bright south-facing space with views through the trees of the arboretum. The multi-purpose foyer space can accommodate temporary cultural uses - the space can extend outside under the large mature plane trees, when the façade is opened. An external south and west facing terrace (80m²), is located outside the dining area, with views through the trees and towards the playground. Ancillary uses, including accessible toilet and baby change facilities, are located adjacent to both spaces. Staff changing areas and plant areas are incorporated to the rear of the kitchen. The kitchen and associated storage spaces are connected to a screened bin-store area, accessed from the approach ramp. Accessible toilet and baby change facilities (17m²) are provided for general usage by visitor to the park at the promenade level and for playground users at the lower level.

The external appearance of the proposed tearooms will enhance the existing characteristics and connection with nature in the park - constructed of stone elements to the north, with a green wall allowing planting to grow on building elements to the west and where anchored into the slope. To the south, lighter timber and glass structure & facades enclose the dining area, hovering above the landscape, allowing the building to 'touch the ground lightly' and reducing the impact of the buildings foundations on the site.

Timber and glass facades will incorporate opening sections of various sizes capturing views in different directions whilst optimising the quality of sunlight in internal spaces. A sheltering roof will extend horizontally at particular locations between the trees to provide shade from sun and shelter from rain. Discrete landscaping and approach paths will complement the existing and refurbished paths, integrating the tearooms into their setting.

The external works ancillary to the building will comprise: a new landscaped, ramped access and steps leading from the promenade to the building entrance and paved terrace; the extension of the pathway to the east of the site to provide a new connection to the terrace and playground; the alteration of the existing steps and fence to the playground and provision of seating area at the playground level.

The proposed works will include new lighting along the north promenade to enhance visibility at nighttime.

A meeting was held with key stakeholders invited including Dublin Civic Trust, An Taisce, Irish Georgian Society with a presentation by Howley Hayes Architects and Bucholz McEvoy respectively on the Conservation Plan for Merrion Square Park and on the tearoom proposal. Details of the stakeholder consultation are included in the appendices to this report.

Parks and Landscape Services Division now wishes to notify the Chairperson and Members of the South East Area Committee of their intention to activate the formal Part 8 process in June.

Les Moore
City Parks Superintendant

PROJECT: Merrion Square Park
 Tearooms
 MTG: Stakeholder Consultation
 PROJECT REF: 0300
 VENUE: RIAI, Merrion Square North
 DATE / TIME: 03.05.017 11.00 am

ATTENDEES
 : *Dublin Civic Trust* Ms. Geraldine Walsh
 Mr. Graham Hickey

AnTaisce Mr. Ian Lumley (partial attendance)

Howley Hayes Architects Mr. James Howley

Bucholz McEvoy Architects Mr. Merritt Bucholz
 Ms. Karen McEvoy

REF	ITEM	NOTE	
1.0	The purpose of the meeting was to explain the proposal for the Merrion Square Park Tearooms in the context of the <i>Conservation Management Plan</i> prepared for the park in 2014, and to give the opportunity for comments to be made prior to the initiation of the Part 8 Planning process.		
1.1	Parties invited to attend included Dublin Civic Trust, An Taisce and the Irish Georgian Society (IGS).		
2.0	James Howley of Howley Hayes Architects presented the <i>Conservation Management Plan</i> prepared in 2014, which formed the context for the Design Team Brief for the tearooms issued by Dublin City Council.		
3.0	Merritt Bucholz and Karen McEvoy of Bucholz McEvoy Architects presented the design approach, plans, sections and elevations of drawings of the proposed scheme, 3D visualizations. Two explanatory physical models (illustrating existing & proposed) were also presented, showing how the tearooms proposal weaves its way between the existing grand London plane trees, in order to minimise the impact on the trees and to 'touch the ground lightly'. Precedent images of similar projects where contemporary tearooms were created in historic London squares were referred to.		
4.0	<i>Dublin Civic Trust</i> representatives (Geraldine Walsh & Graham Hickey) were both very positive about the proposal and supportive of the project in general, noting the sensitive integration of the design into its natural setting.		

5.0	<p>Ian Lumley (<i>An Taisce</i>) queried how the choice of location for the project was arrived at, and the appropriateness of the context for a tearoom. Dublin City Council explained that the <i>Conservation Management Plan</i> undertaken in 2014, and presented by James Howley, had explained the process undertaken and addressed the issues raised. The plan had made recommendations for a number of projects that would greatly enhance the amenity value of the park including the provision of a tearooms. It was noted that Merrion Square Innovation Network (MSIN) comprised of a group of stakeholders in and around Merrion Square was very supportive of locating a tearooms in the park.</p> <p>Donough Cahill of the Irish Georgian Society was invited but was unable to attend and sent his apologies. After the meeting 3D visualisations of the proposal and site location map were sent on to him.</p>		
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