



Report

Newcomen Bank Building / City Hall

Background

Newcomen: Newcomen Bank Building, (formerly the rates office) was vacated in April 2019. A steering group from Dublin City Council was appointed to explore options and to complete a redevelopment of the building with a Public / Culture usage as the primary objective.

City Hall: It is recognised that the political party rooms in City Hall are no longer fit for purpose in their current condition and in the amount of rooms available. One political party has already been forced to take up office space in Civic Offices. The same steering group was asked to explore a potential upgrade of the working conditions provided for the elected representatives while also examining options to improve the current public uses of the building.

It is envisaged that both Newcomen and City Hall could have some shared operational functions in order to improve services in both buildings.

Considerations:

The steering group took several factors into consideration when seeking to progress the projects. These included:

- Functionality of City Council Business
- Event facilitation & clashes
- Accessibility
- Exhibition lifespan
- Exhibition space
- Structural issues
- Conservation (limitations with I.T etc.)
- Improved event space
- Noise levels
- Room / Office size
- Storage space
- Staff space
- Security
- Structural repairs
- Lift, lift Shaft & Emergency stairs
- Main Staircase (Newcomen)
- Sound proofing

Concepts:

Following due consideration and research the steering group proposed the following options for each building.

Newcomen: Newcomen would be utilised as a public / cultural amenity that would allow for rolling exhibition space in the large basement floor. This would cater for short and medium term domestic and international exhibitions to use the space throughout the year providing a cultural space that was open to the public.

The ground and upper floors would be redeveloped and upgraded to create an events and conferencing centre to cater for small and medium size meetings, events and functions.

This is an evidence based approach based on the success of the Wood Quay venue and the Richmond Events Centre. Both of which are heavily booked as there was a lack of this type of resource within the city centre. Additionally, there is a cost saving as elected representatives and Dublin City Council departments could book the spaces and make use of them at no cost for a set amount of hours. Operationally a community rate would also be agreed to support community events.

It is universally agreed that the exceptional significance of Newcomen as one of the foremost historical buildings in the City should be accessible and open to the general public while also providing an essential function not only to the City Council but to all. (To date public access has been limited to those paying their rates or for guided tours on Culture Night). The proposals to be agreed and developed therefore are for the vast majority of the building to be open for use either as an exhibition space or for booked events. The remainder of the building would be used by cultural organisations for short term rentals when organising events in the city.

City Hall: Proposals have been developed for City Hall to include, the provision of additional Part Rooms and meeting rooms in the basement; the upgrading of existing party rooms and the provision of better administration and printing facilities for Councillors. It was agreed that the exhibition space in the basement of City Hall (now 18 years old) would be better used for Councillor and City Council purposes and that the intrinsic artefacts from the exhibition would be rehoused in the basement within a reduced publically accessible events/exhibition area. A proposal was made to redevelop the basement level (see Appendix A) of the building to include:

- 2 additional political party rooms
- 1 new councillor hub to contain 2 small 1-1 / 1-2 person private meeting rooms, 2 new individual work stations and additional storage.
- 1 new meeting room.
- A reduced offering to the exhibition which would however include the intrinsic artefacts from the current exhibition (as agreed with the City Librarian/City Archivist) held in a multi-functional space (the circular room) with the potential to cater for public events. (Appendix B – Report from City Librarian)

Timeframe and Cost:

Newcomen: Programme

It is proposed to appoint a multi-disciplinary design team (led by a conservation architect and including engineers, a QS etc) to agree and develop detailed proposals for the reuse of Newcomen. This process will include detailed discussions with all stakeholders (including the Elected Representatives) leading to an agreed design proposal and a Part 8 planning submission. Due to the complex nature of the providing modern facilities within a sensitive heritage building this process will be carefully executed with a Part 8 proposal due for submission to the City Council by Summer 2021. It is envisaged that construction would begin in the Spring of 2022 and would be completed approximately 14 months later in the middle of 2023.

Cost estimate:

A cost estimate based on the uses for the building as outlined above has been completed with a total project cost of €9,466,800 (this includes all fees, VAT, contingency etc).

City Hall: Programme

The City Architects division have developed proposals for the improvements to City Hall as outlined above and we are now in discussion with the conservation officer to agree the extent of the works and approach. It is envisaged (subject to agreement) that the works can be fully completed in City Hall by late 2021.

Cost estimate:

A cost estimate based on the uses for the building as outlined above has been completed with a total project cost of €700,000 (this includes all fees, VAT, contingency etc).

Progress:

Following consultation with the Protocol committee it was agreed that a sub-committee of elected representative be formed to liaise with the steering group for the projects. To date a number of meetings and site visits have been held with the sub-committee both in late 2019 and more recently in July of this year. The general response from the sub-committee has to date been very positive in relation to the proposed changes. While generally it was felt that the timeframe and cost of Newcomen was somewhat prohibitive and that the option to retain councillor function in City Hall was preferable; it was agreed that further discussion would be required with the Protocol Committee before a final decision was taken.

The next stage in the process would be to reach agreement with the Protocol Committee to allow the design options for City Hall to be finalised and for works to commence and be completed in 2021. The current restricted use of the building due to the pandemic would allow these works to be completed in a timely fashion and with minimum impact on the use of the building both by the Elected Representatives and the general public. Separately the intergrated design team for Newcomen would be appointed in the coming months to allow detailed discussion, consultation and analysuis to begin culminating on an agreed design being put forward as a Part 8 application.