

**Memo to Chair and Members of the
Arts & Culture Strategic Policy Committee**

16th September 2022

A Proposal for a Dublin City Council Museum on Chatham Row

The former DIT School of Music, Chatham Row was constructed in 1890, on the site of the Clarendon Market to accommodate a DFB fire station and the City Laboratory. In 1907, it was re-purposed as a music school when the central fire station was relocated to Tara Street and control of the building was transferred to the predecessors of Technological University Dublin (TUD).

The building was handed back to the City Council in 2021, when the TUD School of Music relocated to the new campus at Grangegorman. Pending a decision of the future use of the building, a short-term licence was granted to the Press Up Group to use the building to accommodate artists' studios. (The Press Up Group has given a commitment to relocate the artists; studios as soon as the licence expires.)



Former College of Music premises, Chatham Row

The City Council is considering the future use of the building and a number of options are being examined. The preferred option at this time and subject to the approval of the Elected Members, is to refurbish the building as a City Council museum, which would accommodate the following uses:

(i) Dublin Fire Brigade (DFB) Heritage and Education Centre

DFB was established in 1862 as part of Dublin Corporation. In 1898, the DFB ambulance Service was established, since then DFB has provided fire, emergency ambulance and rescue services to the people of Dublin who hold the service in very high regard. It is envisaged that the proposed Heritage and Education Centre will tell the story of DFB and provide a venue to engage with the public on fire safety educational issues.

(ii) Venue to Display the Lord Mayor's Coach

The highly decorated Lord Mayor's Coach, was completed in 1791. It is considered a worthy celebration of exceptional Dublin craftsmanship with its decorative paintings and carvings. It is still a working vehicle and is used on ceremonial occasions typically twice a year – leading the annual St. Patrick's Day Dublin Parade and bringing the Lord Mayor to the RDS Ballsbridge during the Dublin Horse Show event every August. It is in storage between these outings and not accessible to the public.



Lord Mayor of Dublin's Coach

(iii) Museum for Various Civic Collections held by Dublin City Council

Dublin City Council owns a number of important collections including the following:

- The Dublin Civic Museum Collection
- The Dublin City Council Weights & Measures collection.
- The Wide Street Commissioners Maps
- Dublin City Council Archives.

The Chatham Row museum could potentially house elements of these collections probably on a temporary rotating basis. (Elected Members have long sought to have these collections accessible to the public.)

(iv) Museum for Other Collections

There are other important collections of material not in the City Council's ownership, which fall outside the remit of the national cultural institutions, that might be available and that would contribute significantly to telling a more comprehensive story of Dublin if a suitable venue was available to display the material. The Chatham Row museum could potentially exhibit elements of other collections on a temporary basis.

Dublin has a long history of municipal governance, which has undoubtedly influenced the development and character of the city. The role of the City Council and its predecessors in the everyday life of the city of Dublin and providing services for the people of Dublin, deserves to be recognised and celebrated. A Civic Museum would assist in achieving this objective.

Colin Mulberg Consulting, a specialist museum consultancy was engaged to carry out a preliminary assessment of options for the Chatham Row development. Their assessment concluded as follows:

'The available evidence suggests that there are a number of viable options for the Chatham Row site that would be attractive to a range of audience, linked to opportunities to increase earned income.'

Subject to the agreement of the Committee, it is proposed to engage specialist curatorial expertise to work with the various collections and material proposed for the Chatham Row development and with a consultant architect to develop the preferred option proposal for the building.

If the SPC is happy to proceed on this basis, an internal DCC Steering Group will be established to oversee the development of the proposal. The SPC might consider nominating three Elected Members to participate in the Steering Group.

Richard Shakespeare
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