



Report on Dublin City (500 seat) Cultural Venue

Dublin City Council – 500-seater venue - Conceptual Feasibility Update Report

1. After an initial project inception on 20th October 2022, it became clear that the anticipated programme and scope of work proposed was inconsistent with the needs and expectations of Dublin City Council officers – and the intent of the SPC / ACAG.
2. It was quickly established that rather than a fully costed spatial and technical feasibility outlined in our previous scope (although our work will still be drawing in elements of this) the report should focus on a “Conceptual Feasibility” detailing the parameters for developing a 500-seater performance venue in the City, its impact on programming across the city, and establishing a conceptual vision for the “City Theatre of Tomorrow”.
3. As such following revisions to scope were agreed, and Arthur Lappin was appointed to the project team to provide expert advice on venue design and undertake a “programming impact assessment” through engagement and consultation with the sector. Principally this additional work is focused on addressing the following considerations:
 - the demand for a new 500 seat venue in Dublin - the public, production companies (across performative artforms – Theatre, Music, Opera, Dance etc.), festivals, independent producers/promoters etc
 - What would be the likely impact of a new 500 seat venue in Dublin on existing Dublin venues?
 - What will be the commercial impact, in terms of ‘profitability’ break-even, of a new theatre of this capacity?
 - What might be the governance structure(s) / commercial arrangements for letting the venue - straight rentals/splits/guarantees etc?
 - Will the venue be simply be a receiving theatre available for hire by outside groups/promoters or is there an expectation that its programme will be curated?
4. Following the appointment and rescoping process, work commenced in late February and to date the following areas of contribution to the Feasibility Report have been undertaken:

Research and Analysis

5. Turley has undertaken a detailed analysis of the policy context, both cultural and planning related, including a review of the Dublin City Council Development Plan 2022-2028. What this has identified is clear supportive rational for a 500 seat venue and policies that support cultural regeneration more widely, but a lack of policy mechanism within the Development

Plan or LAPs (as there is no proposed or existing LAP within the project target areas of the city centre i.e. within the bounds of canals) that could secure development contribution for a cultural space of this nature.

6. As part of a developing need assessment Turley has also completed a review (attached) of existing development proposals (speculative, in planning or with planning secured) that have identified a theatre or other similarly scaled venue typology as part of their cultural space proposals. These include:
 - **Balark Trading GP Limited - College Green, Dublin 2** The 500-seater venue is housed in the basement (levels -1 and -2) of the building. The proposed venue is 3,349sqm with capacity for c.500 people. The box office / entrance to the venue is at ground floor level.
 - **Marbels and Holdings Limited (on behalf of Ballymore) - Guinness Quarter, Dublin 8** The main cultural / multipurpose space provided in the development is located at ground floor level in the Plot 1 building. This is a triple void space that is located adjacent to public house / restaurant / café / retail uses. The space doesn't appear to have been designed as a permanent seated venue.
 - **Dublin Docklands** - Recent news reports indicate that developer Harry Crosbie has submitted a proposal to Waterways Ireland to redevelop three dry docks in Ringsend for public use, including an entertainment venue with a capacity twice the size of the Vicar Street venue (c.2000 people), a boat repair facility and an open space for markets and festivals.
7. Arthur Lappin is currently undertaking a review of existing similarly scaled venues, including but not limited to, the O'Reilly Theatre, The Helix and Grange Gorman Concert Hall, alongside consideration of a potentially expanded Smock Alley Theatre, to review their existing performance, design features and programming contribution, and the respective "gap" and "impact" a further operating venue of scale may serve. This work is close to completion.
8. To inform conceptual design requirements, Arrow Architects have undertaken a review of venue typology best practice exemplars:
 - **Multi Artform Performance Venue - The Fire Station Auditorium, Sunderland (Music, Arts and Culture Trust)** Auditorium (capacity for 425-550 people seated or 800 people standing, 600 people in the outdoor performance space), dance and creative writing studios, outdoor stage, bar, restaurant.
 - **Theatre for the Future - The Royal Danish Playhouse** An excellent showcase of how to plan multi format theatre with a 650-seat proscenium main stage, 250 portal stage mezzanine, and 100 audience small stage.
 - **Multi-artform / Multi-purpose venue – Plassen Cultural Centre, Norway.** A space that facilities Theater, performance areas, library, café, exhibition space within a 350 seat "flat floor" space.

9. It would be helpful to have the SPC ACAG feedback on these typologies (attached), as an indication of the vision and intent the city has for a new 500 seat venue.

Further Analysis and Feasibility Considerations and Actions

10. During the month of May, a stakeholder survey and interviews will be in field, developed by Turley and Arthur Lappin to gather insights from producers, venue operators, funders and performative artists (across artforms inc. Theatre, Music, Opera, Dance etc.) across the city on both the design and technical preferences of the sector, and consideration of the programming impact, governance and operating models for a new venue.
11. Turley are also undertaking a spatial assessment of the city, considering existing cultural infrastructure, cultural hub, and venue locations (and closures) which alongside the policies review will inform an assessment matrix detail the areas of the city centre were a venue may be most suited.
12. Once completed, alongside the insights gathered, this will inform the basis of a conceptual design proposal by Arrow Architects. Once completed we will present our draft considerations of the Conceptual Feasibility Report in June alongside our joint recommendations on proposed programming impact, outline costs, and potential operating and governance approaches.

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