

LIBERTIES
LOCAL AREA PLAN
REPORT TO SOUTH CENTRAL
AREA COMMITTEE

MARCH 2020

1. BACKGROUND

On the 11 May 2009, DCC adopted the LAP. On 3 March 2014 DCC, in accordance with Section 19 (e) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) (the Act) extended the life of the LAP for a further 5 years. This decision was based on the Chief Executive's recommendation which recognised that the economic downturn had a major impact on the delivery of the objectives of the LAP.

The LAP will expire on 10 May 2020. There is no further facility to extend the life of the existing LAP beyond this 5 year period.

2. OVERARCHING OBJECTIVES OF THE LAP

The Overarching Objectives of the LAP as set out in 2009 included:

- *To improve the quality of life so that the Liberties becomes a great place for people to live, work and visit.*
- *To provide for appropriate social and community infrastructure to support the existing population, which is growing and becoming increasingly diverse.*
- *To provide for a wide diversity and choice of housing that can cater for families and older people by including options for mixed tenure and a range of housing types and unit sizes.*
- *To stimulate the local economy and to include a critical mass of appropriate development and investment to provide significant employment opportunities, including in the digital media sector as the Digital Hub has the potential to rejuvenate the economic profile of the Liberties.*
- *To identify and protect the distinctive heritage of the area and encourage sustainable and innovative re-use of historic spaces and structures.*
- *To create a high quality network of public spaces, parks and streets.*

3. ASSESSMENT OF LAP

Having regard to the overall objectives set down in the LAP, it is considered that the Liberties has made considerable progress on a number of fronts as follows.

REGENERATION

The Liberties area has been the subject of significant regeneration over the period of the LAP. A Greening Strategy has been implemented, a number of vacant and underutilised sites have been developed and the opening of distilleries with associated visitor attractions has increased tourism in the area. Thomas Street and other streets have experienced a moderate revival.

To the south and east of Newmarket Square the Blackpitts area has seen significant redevelopment incorporating student housing and hotel development.

POPULATION

In 2006 the population for the LAP area was 13,157 persons. By 2016 the population had increased by 16.5% to 15,340 persons. This compares with a citywide population increase of 9.5% in the same 10 year period (506,211 persons to 554,554 persons). The increase in the LAP population over and above the citywide rate of growth is indicative that the LAP has been successful in attracting nett inward population. Thus one of the key objectives of the LAP has been achieved.

EMPLOYMENT

The growth in employment related tourism in the Liberties area has exceeded expectations. The Guinness brewery is Ireland's number one tourist attraction.

The provision of new hotels in the area has added to this tourist infrastructure of the area as well its economic performance.

Despite the global trends in the retail sector, the Liberties area has seen an improvement in the health of retail over the lifetime of the LAP. Most notably this can be seen on Thomas Street, Francis Street and Cork Street.

The "Dubline" project has been implemented, with tourist signage, panels and historic markers supporting the tourism offer in the Liberties area.

The development of the National Children's Hospital (NCH) at St James's Hospital on James's Street is the largest capital programme currently underway in the country. The NCH is set to act as a catalyst for significant further health care development in the area, as well as becoming a large new employer.

NEW RESIDENTIAL

The ambitious public housing redevelopment/regeneration contained in the LAP did not proceed as planned due to the economic circumstances prevailing at the time. However it is now anticipated that new public housing projects will proceed in the near future in areas such as the cluster around School Street/Summer Street North and projects at Grand Canal Basin, Michael Mallin House.

Public housing projects at Bonham Street and Weaver Square are currently on site and will deliver 112 units. As noted above, as of Q2 2019 there is planning permission in place for an additional 934 residential units in the Liberties area. The plans for the St. James's Gate site envisage an additional 500 new homes. It is therefore considered that the area is primed for the delivery of a significant amount of both public and private housing, in accordance with the LAP.

PUBLIC REALM

The LAP objectives relating to the improvement of the public realm focused mostly on major public open spaces and key routes. These included improvements in the areas of signage, tree planting along major routes, consistent use of materials, widening of footpaths where possible, improve pedestrian crossings and improve public lighting.

In 2015 the Liberties Greening Strategy (the Greening Strategy) was published. The Greening Strategy provides a vision for the Liberties area based on a network of new urban parks and a strategy of area wide tree planting focussed on DCC lands. A review of the Greening Strategy is currently being carried out.

The Francis Street Environmental Improvement Scheme (FSEIS) has been carried out by focusing on public realm improvements along Francis Street, Hanover Lane and parts of Dean Street. In 2017 Part 8 Planning Permission was granted for the FSEIS. Work on its implementation is to commence in the coming months.

In 2019 Meath Street public realm improvement plan commenced and is currently at concept design stage. In 2020 the plan is expected to a planning consent under Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) (the Regulations) before commencing site works.

Since 2014 Thomas Street and James Street areas have been subject to a programme of major public realm renewal. This has included the renewal of pavements and street surfaces, installation of 60 new lighting columns, provision of 90 tree planters together with improved pedestrian crossings. Much of this work occurred through the Dubline Project.

The completed Cornmarket and City Walls public realm improvements have significantly added to the upgraded of the Liberties.

Planning consent under Part 8 of the Regulations has been granted at Newmarket Square for the redevelopment of the public realm to facilitate pedestrianised events and a market space, together with cultural space and a café.

As a result it can therefore be seen that there has been a significant improvement to the public realm since the inception of the LAP. Furthermore the LAP has provided guidance on planned improvements for other areas.

PARKS

In 2017 Weaver Park open on Cork Street on the site of a former DCC housing development. Weaver Park contains a skate park, a children's play area and a recreational area.

In 2019 St Auden's Park on High Street was substantially redesigned to incorporate a number of archaeological features that had been uncovered as part of landscaping works.

A redesigned Bridgefoot Park is set to commence development shortly following the granting of planning consent under Part 8 of the Regulations. The redesign will incorporate allotment gardens and a football court.

St Luke's Church was substantially refurbished to incorporate a new public accessible pocket park fronting St Luke's Avenue.

Oscar Square has also been re-opened to the public over the life time of the LAP.

St. James's Graveyard is due to be reopened to the public. St. Catherine's Park off Thomas Street will also be subject to further investment.

All the aforementioned works are in line with the LAP's objective to encourage sustainable and innovative re-use of historic spaces and structures in order to create a high quality network of public spaces, parks and streets.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

In 2012 the Thomas Court Primary Care Centre opened at Catherine's Lane West, replacing the South Earl Street Health Centre.

Many of the objectives for new community facilities were dependent upon regeneration of the DCC housing stock, which has not occurred to date but are anticipated to be delivered in the near future. It is noted that there is currently a feasibility study in relation to the provision of artists' studios at Bridgefoot Street.

The Area Office has been active in supporting a number of initiatives in the area:

Delivery of a network of approximately 40 allotments:

- Supporting the use of vacant spaces by artists (e.g. Basic Space, Steambox and the NCAD galleries).
- The public library on Kevin Street has been also been refurbished.

KEY REDEVELOPMENT SITES

Chapter 7 of the LAP identifies Key Development Sites (KDS) with site specific objectives. These include Marrowbone Lane Depot (Variation 6 of the Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022) for a consolidated depot and 100 plus residential units, Pimlico, where the Housing Department has commenced the preparation of a 'Liberties Cluster' of approximately 330 homes; Bridgefoot Street/Bonham Street; Newmarket; Digital Hub and the Guinness Lands (South of Thomas Street), where Diageo have been in the process of selecting a winning design for the redevelopment of the southern part of the St James's Gate lands, estimated to have a value of €1Bn. The redevelopment of these lands has the potential to incorporate 500 new homes, significant office space (c.63,000 sqm), hotel and leisure spaces aswell as retail space (c.5,000 sqm). This process is ongoing.

4. CONCLUSION

Having regard to the above and to the pattern of developments in the Liberties area, it is considered that the overall objectives of the LAP have been predominantly met or are in the process of being achieved through various projects as outlined above.

Furthermore it is considered that the Development Plan contains a sufficiently robust policy direction with which to influence and manage public and private sector change within the area. SDRA 16 relates to the Liberties and contains a number of Guiding Principles which can be used to inform the Development Management process going forward. The review of the Development Plan including the SDRA 16 will commence this summer and offers the opportunity to revise and update the objectives as they relate to the Liberties. There is also an opportunity for a Local Environmental Improvement Plan (LEIP) to be developed for the Liberties if necessary.

It is concluded that the upcoming review of the Development Plan can incorporate the principles and objectives of the LAP into the new Dublin City Development Plan 2022-2028. This can be achieved through the following;

- i) Continued designation of a SDRA for the Liberties
- ii) Identification of a LEIP for the Liberties, as appropriate

RECOMMENDATION OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

To note the Report

John O'Hara
Dublin City Planning Officer