

Preliminary Feasibility Review of the Potential to Develop a Heated Outdoor Swimming Pool Public Amenity in Dublin City Centre



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1. Introduction

During the public consultation on the proposed White-Water Rafting Facility in George's Dock it became apparent that there was a demand for a public outdoor swimming facility in the city centre of Dublin. As this demand could not be accommodated in the proposed George's Dock development the City Council gave a commitment that it would consider how such a facility might be delivered having regard to similar facilities that have been developed in other city centre locations.

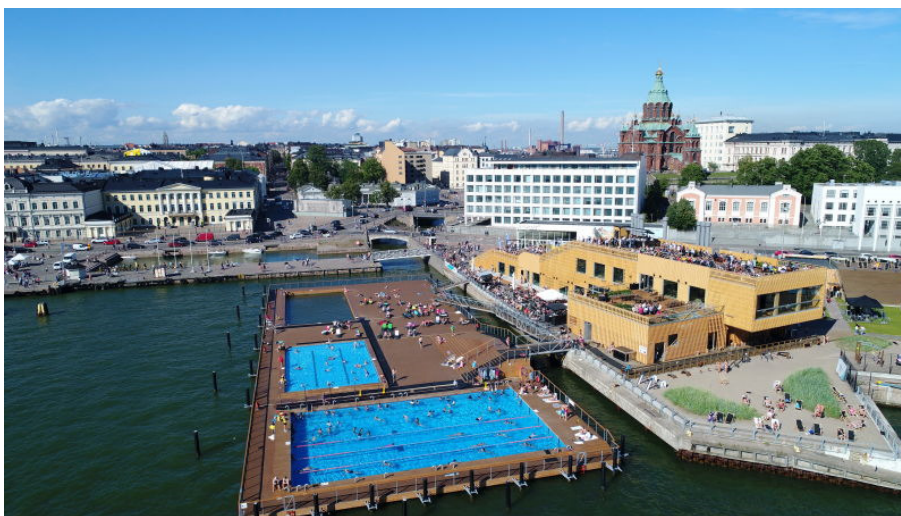
2. The Allas Sea Pool Facility in Helsinki

Established in 2014, initially under a 5-year licence from Helsinki City Council, this public amenity is regarded as a social and economic success. In 2019, approximately 800,000 visitors enjoyed the various elements of this amenity which include:

- One heated outdoor pool, 50m long x 15m wide
- One smaller heated outdoor pool for children
- One small non-heated pool using treated seawater
- Changing rooms, Sauna facilities and Yoga rooms
- Meeting rooms for corporate events
- A large café/bistro restaurant
- Outdoor seating area

The admission price for use of the swimming pools is €14 per day, with the average visit duration of 3 hours. Discounts apply for 'Senior citizens' and 'Members'. The three pools are constructed on a 'floating platform' connected to the land by 3 access 'gangways'. Overall, the Allas facility presents itself as a 'Wellness Hub'.

Of the 800,000 visitors in 2019, 300,000 paid for access to the pools, 200,000 paid for access to Sauna, Yoga and Corporate events, whilst 300,000 enjoyed free access to relax in the café/restaurant and general seating areas.



3. Other ‘Sea Pools’ in Cities

Across Europe, other capital cities have similar public amenities, including:

Paris Outdoor Swimming Pool



Berlin – Badeschiff Baths





Copenhagen – Floating baths at Aarhus Harbour



Proposed Facility in New York)



Turku is a small city in Finland with a population of c. 200,000. This ‘Artist’s Impression’ shows a relatively modest Sea Pool public amenity which will shortly be located there. The entire amenity will be on a floating platform, c.150 metres long



4. Potential for a ‘SEA POOL’ Facility in Dublin City Centre

(a) The Concept

The objective is to provide a public amenity located in a pleasant open air environment for citizens and visitors to swim and relax in. It should be suitable for all citizens. The centre-piece would be the outdoor swimming pool build from a modified steel barge measuring c.50 metres long, 12-15 metres wide and 2 metres deep.

A section of the pool can be adjusted to reduce the depth to (say) 0.5 metres for children. The pool will contain fresh water, which will be heated to 26°C.

The pool will be part of the overall infrastructure which will be c. 150 metres long and 30 metres wide, to facilitate the other elements of the Sea Pool concept (i.e. changing rooms; café/bistro; yoga rooms; general meeting rooms etc.) It is also recommended that saunas are a significant feature of this public amenity.

(b) Location Options

Looking at other capital cities and particularly at Helsinki, the location of such a public amenity is crucial to its success. The most critical factor is public access and access to public transport. Four possible city centre locations were examined as follows:

Spencer Dock



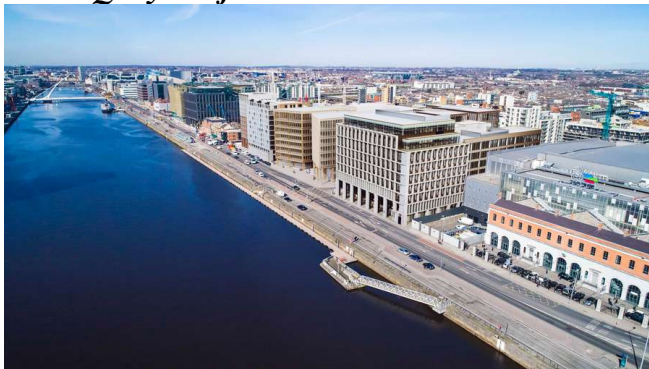
Spencer Dock was considered to be too small for the infrastructure needed for the proposed Sea Pool, which could have up to 800,000 visitors per annum.

Grand Canal Dock



This is an attractive option. It has no significant ‘tidal’ issues, and the U2 attraction will be located there. Access to public transport is good, albeit somewhat problematic for citizens travelling from the north-side of the city. However, in terms of proximity to the city centre, Grand Canal Dock would not be the optimum location.

North Quays Adjacent to 3 Arena



This area has many good and practical benefits, but fundamentally it is too far away from the city centre (2.5km from O’Connell Street). The strong tidal flow is also a disadvantage.

North Quays Adjacent to Dublin Docklands Office



This is an attractive option given its proximity to the city centre and very good public transport links. The strong tidal flow is a disadvantage.

A basic multi criteria decision analysis of the various options was conducted. The results are set in the table below:

Location	Spencer Dock	Grand Canal Dock	Adj. to Sean O'Casey Bridge	Adj. to the 3 Arena
Criteria				
Public Transport	5	4	5	3
Availability of suitable space	1	4	4	5
Adding to visitor cluster effect	2	4	5	2
Visibility of amenity	2	3	5	2
Tidal Impacts	5	5	0	0
Interference with Other Activities	4	2	4	4
Total	19	22	24	17

Based on this analysis the optimum location is adjacent to the Sean O'Casey Bridge opposite the CHQ building and the (yet-to-be-constructed) White-Water Centre.

By locating the proposed new Sea Pool adjacent to the current Dublin Docklands office, Dublin City Council can create a new 'Visitor Destination' which also includes the Jeanie Johnston, The EPIC Diaspora Museum and the White-Water Centre. The combination of these amenities will attract families from Dublin and from other parts of Ireland, and will give our overseas visitors a new and very healthy option to enjoy their stay in our capital city.

Artist Impression of Sea Pool Complex adjacent to Sean O’Casey Bridge



Dublin Port Company has advised that they have no issues with the proposed development at this location. They will need to be consulted on detailed design aspects in relation to marine safety risks for passing craft as well as on insurance and licensing arrangements.

(c) Creating a ‘Destination’

The recent and ongoing development of the Quays, on both sides of the Liffey, is hugely impressive. Relative to a decade or so ago, this area is now becoming a hive of activity, with office, residential and hotel developments of a very significant scale.

There is, a corresponding need for the provision of leisure-related activities, to cater for the growing population both resident and office based. In this context, the addition of a family-orientated public amenity such as the Sea Pool will create a very exciting four facility ‘cluster’ of attractions to enable citizens, families and tourists to enjoy a day in the Docklands. The four facilities are as follows:

- the proposed White-Water Centre,
- the Jeanie Johnston,
- the Diaspora Museum – EPIC and
- the proposed Sea Pool facility.



One of the advantages of locating the proposed Sea Pool facility beside the Sean O’Casey Bridge opposite the CHQ building is that it would be immediately adjacent to the EPIC Diaspora Centre, the Jeanie Johnston and the proposed White-Water Centre. The ‘cluster’ of visitor attractions should offer a number of significant advantages including:

- Shared security costs
- Cross-ticketing (via a dedicated website)
- Shared approach to Health and Safety
- Local marketing, local website
- Potential sharing of some facilities (e.g. lockers etc.)

(d) Planning and Foreshore Lease

The ‘*North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock SDZ Water Animation Strategy 2014*’ supports the animation of the waterways in the Docklands Area. Its primary objective is as follows:

‘to promote the use of the waterways as an integral part of the vitality and experience of Dublin Docklands, that enhances the area as a world class destination for living, working, tourism, leisure, and cultural activities.’

The development of a Sea Pool at this location is also consistent with the City Development Plan 2016 to 2022.

As there are likely to be significant environmental and conservation issues to be addressed, a direct application to An Bord Pleanála will most likely be required. In addition, a Foreshore Lease application will have to be made to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

(e) Procurement Models

There are a number of risks associated with any proposal to develop a Sea Pool facility, adjacent to the Sean O’Casey Bridge, along the lines of the Allas Sea Pool facility in Helsinki. These risks including the following:

- planning risk, given the sensitive location and the need for a foreshore lease
- construction risk, given the marine location and
- commercial risk, the facility needs to generate sufficient income to cover its operating costs and to fund the capital cost of the development.

It is clear from similar facilities in other cities that it is possible to attract reputable private operators who would be prepared to take on the total responsibility for the project, including: design, build, operate and funding (DBOF). This can be achieved on the basis of a circa 30 year licence, with a reasonably nominal annual licence fee payable to Dublin City Council. It is suggested that the award criteria for the right to construct and operate a Sea Pool facility at this location would include the following:

- Experience and financial resources of promoter/operator.
- Quality of the design and proposed construction methodology.
- Proposed pricing model,
- Proposed community engagement model,
- Length of licence required,
- Annual premium payable to the City Council.

Once the licence agreement expires, the City Council will have the option of taking over the facility or it can require the operator to remove the entire infrastructure.

There are a number of credible and significant companies which would have both the financial and technical capability to submit high-quality bids for this project.

The required capital expenditure is likely to be in excess of €15m, the licence period is likely to be of the order of circa 30 years, and the overall revenue value over the concession is likely to exceed €100m.

This process should start with an ‘Expressions of Interest’ process, to facilitate a pre-procurement market consultation. Preliminary market consultation will provide insights about the capacity of the market to deliver on the requirements of Dublin City Council and help refine the tender process. It will also allow potential operators to ask questions at an early stage, prior to the commencement of the formal procurement process. In tandem with this market consultation, Dublin City Council can start preparing the formal tender documentation, the award criteria and the weighting criteria.

(f) Pricing

It is estimated that in similar facilities in Berlin and Helsinki that c.50% of total revenue comes from food and beverage, 30% from swimming and 20% from a combination of yoga, sauna and events. Pricing in the Helsinki Sea Pool is currently set at €14 per day, with the average usage duration of 3 hours.

For a similar facility in Dublin, it is recommended that a web-based booking system is put into place where visitors book online for a 2-hour slot for €10, (*the equivalent of a trip to the cinema*) with appropriate concessions for those aged over 65 and discount rates for families at specific **times** of the day.

Membership offers will probably form an important part of the overall revenue mix for this public amenity.

(g) Construction and Energy Supply Considerations

It is recommended that the platform on which the Sea Pool will be located is constructed mainly from wood (see artist’s impression below) with the obvious exception of any steel piles that are required to anchor the platform. Consideration, especially from a cost perspective, should be given as to whether the platform is on a piled structure at a fixed height, or on a floating structure which would allow the platform to rise and fall in tandem with the +/- 4 metre tide.



It is widely recognised and appreciated that the key attraction of a Sea Pool is the fact that one can swim in water that is at a nice warm temperature of 26° centigrade. The facility may be able to source its green energy requirements very efficiently by linking into the proposed Dublin District Heating Scheme network. Alternatively, consideration could be given to a ‘Closed Loop Heat Pump’ heating system, utilising the ability to generate heat from under the sea-bed and therefore minimising operating costs. Wind shielding and thermal covers will also need to be considered to maximise heat conservation.

5. Recommended Next Steps

It is recommended in the first instance that a small group of City Council Elected Members visit the Sea Pool facility in Helsinki.