

# REVIEW of PROPOSALS for PORTOBELLO HARBOUR PARK with respect to Access and Use

for

Dublin City Council



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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Aim and Scope**

In May 2023 Fionnuala Rogerson Architects (FRA) were requested by Dublin City Council Parks, Biodiversity and Landscape Services Department (DCC) to review proposals for a new Portobello Harbour Park in terms of its access and use by diverse users. The aim was to look at aspects of the proposal that affect accessibility and use by people, including older people and children, people with mobility impairments, people with hearing or visual impairments, and people with cognitive impairments or learning difficulties.

Extensive consultation had taken place between DCC, the design team, local residents and stakeholders over a period of approximately 12 months prior to FRAs engagement. The current proposals have been informed by these consultations and feed-back and no further consultation was undertaken by FRA.

### **1.2 Methodology**

Between June and August 2023 an initial review of draft Part VIII Design Report and Part VIII Drawings was undertaken and information concerning cycle numbers using the existing marked cycle route through the proposed park area was obtained from DCC.

Several on-line meetings were held with Eddie O’Gara of DCC and one meeting with áit urbanism + landscape, the project landscape architects following which minor amendments were made to the design. Design Strategy diagrams for Accessible Routes, Cycling Share with Care and Activity were further discussed with Eddie O’Gara and the report was updated in the light of changes and clarifications.

Amended drawings were received from DCC on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024 comprising a Landscape Masterplan 22D04-DR-0202, and Site Sections 22D04-DR-204 and 205 together with a Report document titled Part VIII Active Travel & Pedestrian Circulation Considerations. The observations and comments in this report are based on these.

On 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024 the site was inspected to ascertain the level of existing accessibility and current conditions following the completion of the construction of a new hotel which forms the western boundary of the proposed park. Pedestrian and cyclist use, and behaviour were observed over a period 2.5 hours between 11am and 13.30.

## 2.0 EXISTING SITE

### 2.1 Outline Description

The proposed park covers a site area of 0.25 ha, which historically included Portobello Harbour which is now filled in. It is currently in use as a road (Richmond Row), a marked cycle track separated from the carriageway and footways by raised kerbs, a hard landscaped plaza, and a parking area for Dublin City bikes. It is bounded by the Grand Canal and lock at La Touche Bridge to the south and extends to the Lower Deck Bar on the northern side. A new hotel has recently been completed on the west side of the plaza and Portobello House, used as a language school, is on the north-east boundary adjacent to Richmond Street South.



Portobello Harbour Site, viewed from Grove Road towards Portobello House, with canal in foreground.



View north towards the Lower Deck Bar



View south towards the canal

### 2.2 Pedestrian Access

Pedestrian access to the site from the west side of Portobello Harbour is restricted to the north side of the road with no designated crossings until the junction with Richmond Row. There is also pedestrian access along the canal from Portobello Road and from both sides of Richmond Street South. There is no vehicular set-down area or accessible parking.

## 2.3 Cycle Track and Roadway

The segregated Grand Canal Cycle Greenway leads to/from Charlemont Mall across the site via Richmond Row to Portobello Harbour and on to Portobello Road. It is flanked by Richmond Row which accommodates one-way vehicular traffic travelling north towards Lennox Street. There is a Dublin Bike Stand located on the plaza with is reported to be one of the most heavily used stands in the area.



It was noted that cyclists consistently ignored the lights and line markings when crossing Richmond Street South going to / from Richmond Row and the segregated Grand Canal Greenway. Cyclists were also observed taking shortcuts across the plaza to / from the pedestrian path along the canal.

A cycle and pedestrian survey carried out by áit urbanism + landscape indicated that current usage of the site area at its centre, in the vicinity of the bike stands, had up to 150 cycle movements per hour at a peak time (17.00 hours) with up to 500 pedestrian movements at a peak time (13.00 hours) in the area adjacent to Richmond Street South. There were approximately 200 pedestrian movements per hour throughout the afternoon along the canal towpath. Figures have been interpolated from the survey which was based on 20 minute intervals.

## 2.4 Surface Finishes

The site is currently a mix of multiple paving types in various conditions and colours – tarmacadam, modular paving, historic paving and setts. Modular paving around a mature willow tree on the canal bank is badly lifting. Historic granite paving in front of Portobello House is uneven. Temporary surface finishes have been used in some areas. There is no rationale to the types or colours of paving and some tactile blister paving has been poorly and incorrectly laid.



## 2.5 Street Furniture

Street furniture is randomly placed with some raised concrete platforms which act as seating. There are wooden bench seats along the canal, low round bollards along the cycle track, historic cast iron bollards along the canal linked by low swinging chains, and some new low level planters near the hotel.



### 3.0 DESIGN PROPOSAL

#### 3.1 Overview

The proposed design includes:

- the elimination of vehicular traffic except for service and emergency vehicles
- the retention of a cycling route through the park on shared surfaces, designed and signed as “Share with Care”.
- Removal of the Dublin Bike stand and provision of some new cycle stands.
- A new deck along the canal
- New hard landscaping and paving
- New trees, lawns and soft planting
- Informal children’s play space
- Bench seating
- Informal skateboarding provision
- Removal of existing bollards

The design makes provision for the area to be used as both a destination and through route with both passive and active recreation possibilities.

It is envisaged that future users will include local residents, tourists, elderly and young people, children, students, vulnerable people, cyclists and skateboarders amongst others.



Proposed Site layout with a mix of hard and soft areas in an informal layout with a boardwalk along the canal

It is proposed to move the Dublin City Bike Stand further north to Lennox Street. Future proposals for Richmond Street South include the elimination of cars and the creation of cycle lanes both sides of a Bus Connect route. Future proposals also include the development of a Grand Canal Cycle Route along Grove Road to the north of the canal.

It is envisaged that cycle numbers may decrease following the relocation of the bike stands and pedestrian numbers may increase following the development of the park.

### **3.2 Accessible Parking**

Two accessible parking bays are proposed adjacent to the Lower Deck Bar and Hotel on Portobello Harbour. No set down area is shown though space appears to be available between the parking and a loading bay beside the Bar.

### **3.3 Accessible Routes / Comfort Zones**

The designers envisage that accessible routes for more vulnerable pedestrians, who may be concerned about possible interaction with cyclists and different types of micromobility vehicles will be able to mobilise along routes adjacent to the perimeter. Due to careful positioning of seating, planters and bike stands it is intended that these routes are less likely to attract micromobility vehicles which will instead favour the wider more direct routes.

There are only small changes in level throughout the proposed park with the steepest being on the access route to the hotel. This is formed with a gentle slope and there is no need for either ramped or stepped routes.

The entry / exit points for cyclists coming from or going to the cycle routes have been defined as cycle gateways with 3 bollards at each, line marking and tactile surfacing. Bike stands for recreational users or those based locally are located in areas outside the main circulation routes near the hotel and adjacent to Portobello House.

A possible location for informal skateboarding has been identified.

### **3.4 Seating, Lighting and Amenity Areas**

Long lengths of bench seating, some shown with backs, have been located throughout the proposed park in sunny places, around the planted areas, and along the boardwalk facing the canal.

Public lighting is distributed evenly throughout the area.

Soft landscaping with pollinator friendly plants, native hedgerow, bulbs and areas of lawn with defined edges are located throughout. A children's play area surrounded by a variety of specimen and flowering trees is located to the north of the site.

## 4.0 OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

- 4.1 A 2020 study on a university campus in Vancouver<sup>1</sup>, where cyclists and pedestrians share public space, showed that while accidents resulting in injuries were rare and under-reported between these users, tensions were frequent and had an impact on overall mobility experience. Cyclists were at least as concerned about intermodal conflicts and safety as pedestrians and preferred to avoid pedestrian-dominated areas, but that preference was weighed against travel time, ease of wayfinding and avoidance of motor vehicles. Both pedestrians and cyclists identified crowding and pedestrian inattention as major contributing factors, but they disagreed as to whether cyclist speed was a factor. This is borne out by other studies from both Australia and the UK.
- 4.2 An URBACT European study also found that spaces shared by pedestrians and bicycles raise safety and comfort concerns as they allow for movements at very different speeds in mainly unregulated environments. The study found that interactions between pedestrians and bicycles, and particularly with e-mobility vehicles occur frequently and increase insecurity levels in shared space. Moreover, falls from bicycles and e-bikes were found to be frequent in shared spaces.
- 4.3 The Irish National Cycle Manual Section 1.9 notes that shared facilities between pedestrians and cyclists generally result in reduced Quality of Service for both modes and should not be considered as a first option. Cycling for All.ie also recommends that walking and cycling generally need to be segregated.
- 4.4 A study of four shared use paths in London, *Sharing the Space Living Streets* (2016) indicated that shared paths have a disproportionate impact on disabled people who may choose to avoid them. For many vulnerable and older users, it is the perception of cycle / pedestrian conflict that leads to them avoiding places where conflict may occur. People with hearing and/or vision impairment are particularly concerned about safety in shared environments. Similarly, parents or guardians of young children tend to avoid areas with perceived risk of cycle conflict.
- 4.5 Where cycle numbers are low, unsegregated paths over 3m in width are preferred and the width of paths is a key determinant of comfort and harmony between path users. Generally, the path widths throughout the park are well in excess of 3m.
- 4.6 Skateboarding in public areas is an urban activity which can add life to parts of a city for both young and old alike, for both observers and those taking part. FRA have not been part of any of the consultation process with possible future users of the proposed park, but our initial observation was that the park is a relatively small space and to try to mingle skateboarding with pedestrians and cyclists in the most heavily used area of the site is unlikely to work and could lead to accidents. Many cities have had to prohibit or regulate skateboarding due to the potential hazards it can pose to children, pedestrians, and pets. We are informed, based on previous pattern of usage of the area by skateboarders that the skateboarding will mainly happen at nighttime when the park usage by others including more vulnerable users will be very low. A revised layout now shows a possible

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<sup>1</sup> Gkekas, Bigazzi, and Gill (2020) - *Perceived safety and experienced incidents between pedestrians and cyclists in a high-volume non-motorized shared space, Vancouver*, Transportation Interdisciplinary Perspectives 4 (2020)



skateboarding area slightly removed from the potentially more congested area of the site in front of Portobello House but without being too close to the hotel or adjacent housing where the noise could create a nuisance.

- 4.7 The original bollards along the side of the lock, which were joined by chain link and which had been proposed for retention, have now been removed from the design and this is considered a positive development as it has eliminated a potential hazard for blind and vision impaired people, assuming that there is a suitable barrier dividing the slightly different levels in this location.
- 4.8 Routes around the perimeters of the park have been defined as accessible routes with “tapping edges” to allow people who are blind or vision impaired to use either a building edge or roadside kerb to negotiate their way around the space. A band of setts has been introduced where needed to delineate the change of surface leading to the canal edge. Much of this change of surface at the boardwalk is also highlighted by a band of dark blue original limestone. Tactile paving is also shown along the open areas of boundary between the new paved area and the canal. About 50% of the canal boundary is defined by raised edges and seating.



The proposed layout separates pedestrians from cyclists at the junction with Richmond Street South through the use of street furniture

- 4.9 Tactile paving at proposed new dropped kerbs on Portobello Harbour, beside the proposed accessible parking, align with distinct changes in paving colour running parallel to the hotel boundary. This paving is intended to reflect the historic barges that would have once used the harbour.
- 4.10 Any use of the paved area in front of the hotel for movable tables and chairs should only be permitted if a clearly defined access route is maintained.
- 4.11 It is noted that no set-down area for cars or taxis serving the hotel or park has been defined although temporary road markings behind yellow lines describe a set-down area and this should be reviewed.

## 5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 On street improvements of cycle routes along Richmond Street South and Lennox Street should ideally be implemented at the same time as development of the park to provide an alternative and safe route for cyclists allowing them to avoid the Share with Care areas, especially if in transit.
- 5.2 Ensure the continuity of a safe accessible route along the building edge and site perimeter and introduce deterrents to keep cyclists and other micromobility users away.
- 5.3 Consider using and enforcing speed limits for micromobility users – other jurisdictions impose maximum 20km / hr.
- 5.4 Consult with Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) prior to detailed design stage regarding any detailed recommendations they may have and in particular regarding the inclusion of corduroy hazard warning paving at the junction between the stone sett paving at the lock and the new paved area as well as at any openings onto the boardwalk. Obtain confirmation that the use of tactile paving and any tactile guidance paths are correctly designed and located.
- 5.5 Consideration should be given to ensuring that safe routes along the two building lines can be maintained to facilitate mobility by people who are blind or partially sighted e.g. if tables and chairs are to be located outside the hotel a clear space should be kept of minimum two metres width along the face of the building
- 5.6 The crossing point in an east west direction at the Lower Deck Bar should be retained to allow pedestrians move to/from the footpath along Portobello Road to the footpath on the eastern side of Richmond Row and thus to facilitate navigation by way of the building line as far as Portobello House and around the corner to Richmond Street South.
- 5.7 As well as accessible parking, an accessible set-down area should be provided.
- 5.8 A significant proportion of bench seats should be designed so that they cannot be used for skateboarding and include both a variety of arm and back rests. Locate areas within runs of bench seating where buggies and /or wheelchairs can be located.
- 5.9 Consider seating areas where people can sit opposite each other – important for people who are deaf or hard of hearing or who may use sign language.
- 5.10 Where bench seating projects into or runs alongside pedestrian routes it should be detectable at low level using a long cane.
- 5.11 All bollards and street furniture should be designed to follow good practice e.g. BS 8300-1:2018. They should be easily detectable, visible in all lighting conditions and should be kept outside of pedestrian routes.
- 5.12 Consider use of sensory planting as a means of wayfinding
- 5.13 Inclusive detail design of the play area for younger children should include objects that are attractive and usable by children of all abilities.

- 5.14 The proposed use of a range of tones in the paving colour should be carefully selected to ensure that they are not perceived either as level changes by partially sighted people or as barriers to people with cognitive impairments. Care also needs to be taken with the introduction of strongly contrasting coloured bands of paving. Visual contrast between paving colours and patterns should not exceed 20 points difference on the LRV scale.
- 5.15 If change in colour of the paving clearly distinguishes a route across the park it may be sufficient to create a navigable route for people with vision impairments, particularly if it contains a tactile element as a guide and the route is kept clear of obstacles.
- 5.16 All hard surfaces should be smooth and particular care should be taken where setts are being retained that the surfaces are suitable for wheeled mobility devices, buggies and wheelchairs.
- 5.17 Management and maintenance of the space also needs to take account of vulnerable users, for example overhanging vegetation at head height, such as the weeping willow, can be hazardous for blind or partially sighted people.
- 5.18 Ensure that there is clear signage where needed, without creating obstructions.
- 5.19 In conjunction with interested stakeholders DCC should, if possible, identify other areas in Dublin 2 where appropriate skateboard facilities or a skate park can be provided.
- 5.20 The performance of the shared use of the hard surface areas should be monitored carefully following the development of the park to enable any concerns to be identified early on and suitable mitigating measures to be implemented if required.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The proposed park will be a significant improvement on the hard space that is currently in the location of the former Portobello Harbour which is bisected on one side by both a cycle track and a carriageway.
- 6.2 Its use by residents and visitors alike will bring a vital amenity to the area which is to be welcomed.
- 6.3 The addition of a relatively green space in an area which is lacking in parks and amenity areas where people can socialise and interact in a sunny attractive location will impact positively on the locality.
- 6.4 The potential for negative interactions between vulnerable pedestrians and young children and different types of micromobility vehicles cannot be adequately predicted at this stage and more current research is needed as the use of these vehicles increases.
- 6.5 Key to its success will be ongoing stakeholder consultation with good management and control.