Portobello Harbour – June 2024 – Written description of the site and plans.

**Introduction and Context**

# This text has been prepared to provide context for the Part 8 planning application. This document will capture the site, the proposals and context on why the design has arrived at this point. It is not intended to replace the planning report or technical documents but to assist anyone who may require a more detailed written description.

**The project background**

The proposed development of Portobello Harbour into a park began in January 2022. Dublin City Council Parks, Biodiversity and Landscape Services section were charged with leading the project. Over the following months a multi-disciplinary design team was appointed to develop the design proposal. It was agreed at the outset that the project should be co-designed through a serious of workshops, public consultation events and DCC’s online consultation hub with residents and stakeholders, these events were open to all and advertised extensively locally with flyer drops and through social media channels. Through the co design process, it became clear that the site was very constraint and there was limited scope to achieve the desired outcomes within the existing ‘plaza’ space, therefore the boundary of the park was extended to include the carriageway and cycleway along Richmond Row and the area in front of Portobello House. This increased the proposed park area and provided more opportunities to try balance the many needs of the community park which were requested as part of the co design process. The result of increasing the proposed parks area was the removal of vehicle traffic from this stretch of Richmond Row. There was a strong desire from the consultation process to maintain cycle movement and cycle access in the site area. In March 2023 a specific call was made to the DCC register of Disabled Persons Organisations. Two organisations responded, namely the Irish Wheelchair Association & Voice of Vision Impairment.

The key issues which were expressed during these initial conversations were.

1. Important to maintain freedom of movement around the site for all users.
2. Provision of seating, planters and furniture which can be used for navigation and rest by all users.
3. Be mindful of materials in terms of colour and texture which could cause confusion or trip hazards.
4. In terms of shared surfaces, there is a fear factor and indeed dislike for those with reduced mobility interfacing with cyclists and e-scouters. There was an opinion that such movement should not be within the park/amenity space and if this was not possible having the area for movement defined would help mitigate against conflict would be preferable.
5. There was concerns that the removal of the vehicle movement could restrict those with reduced mobility accessing the buildings specifically the language school at Portobello House or the new hotel.
6. There was general discussions around providing safe secure routes for those with reduced mobility around the park area, so that all citizens could easily use the park or access adjacent streets and buildings.

Following on from this initial feedback Dublin City Council appointed a disability consultant to help guide the project and provide a review of the proposals independent of the design team. It was clear from those working on the project that the site even after it was extended was still extremely small, and had multiple requirements / desires by various users and stakeholders. These can be surmised as the following.

1. Safe universal access and movement especially vulnerable users.
2. Continued cycle movement.
3. Continued provision of skateboarding.
4. Play provision for young children.
5. Park users’ interaction with water and nature.
6. Occasional vehicle maintenance access to canal locks (crane) & buildings.
7. Emergency / Fire Access to the buildings.
8. Limit noise to residents from users of the space especially at night.
9. An aesthetic which is ‘Green’ with seating and passive recreation opportunities.

**The Existing Site**

Overall the redline boundary of the site could be considered to have an open appearance, flat, and dominated by grey hard landscaped materials, the most desirable location within the site is along the canal edge which also contains a single large mature willow tree. Below is a description of the existing site, described from looking at a plan with North to the top of the page.

Looking at a plan of the existing site area when you include the area of Richmond Row which will be encompassed into the park, it can be described as a main rectangle 41m long x 36m wide with a smaller rectangle area 15m long x 35m wide connected to the bigger rectangle at the bottom right corner, approximately 7.5 of the 15m is overlapped. In order to describe the area, it will be done by splitting the two areas even though they are one space. Ie the space is two rectangles interconnected.

The larger main rectangle i.e. The 41m x 36m is bounded to the North (top) by Porotbello Harbour Road which is a residential road, on the opposite side of the road is apartments and the lower deck public house these building are 3 and 4 story high. To the south (bottom) is the Grand Canal with one feature mature willow tree on its bank, to the West (left) is a new hotel running the full length apart from a small area on the south which forms the towpath for the canal, the hotel has a glass frontage façade 6 stories high, to the East is an existing bi directional cycle way and a single direction road, with the side of Portobello House and a boundary wall to the rear. A large area is dedicated to Dublin Bike Stands. It is within this area that the existing Portobello Plaza was contained.

The smaller rectangle 7.5m x 15m is bounded to the south (bottom) by the Grand Canal Lock gates, the canal narrows here to form the lock. To the West (left) is partly the canal and then the edge of the main square. The North (top) is Portobello House a listed building which is now a language school 3 stories high. To the East (right) is the busy Richmond Street South / R114 road. Within this area between Portobello house and the Lock Gates 50% of the space is allocated to the bidirectional cycle way and single directional carriageway. Meaning the space is little more than a 6m wide footway in front of the listed building and then 6m road space (cycle & cars) with the canal locks just beyond that.

**The proposals**

The design seeks to create a unified community park space within the site boundary.

Again it is easier to describe the proposals by dividing the site into two spaces, however the proposals unite the space.

The main rectangle area will be transformed from almost 100% paving to approximately 50% paving with a series of green pockets or spaces arranged in an informal manner of various sizes. The area will be repaved allowing generous space for movement around these green spaces.

It will have a timber jetty to the south interfacing with the canal. At the heart and centre of the space will be a lawn edged on two sides with planting and seating and containing two number trees, to the North of the lawn area will be another green space with some play elements. Paving will be granite, reused limestone from site and an abundance of seating. The character will change from the hard landscaped space into more of a green lush pocket park. A wide paved area will be maintained along the façade of the hotel to allow access for fire and emergency vehicle and for access to the canal. The area to the East which was previously the road and cycleway will be paved to allow cycle use and emergency vehicle / maintenance access to the building edge. It will have a planter to the North to create a division between cyclists and pedestrians who would be using the building edge for navigation. To the south along the canal edge linear benches have been located to create a barrier between cyclists and pedestrians using the canal towpath. In the centre of the open space near the lawn area will be a location which will provide skateable edges for informal skating while the paths around the soft landscape areas are wide allowing adequate movement for people.

The smaller rectangle 7.5m x 15m will remain mostly hard landscaped however 3No in ground planted areas have been located to provide a barrier between cyclists and pedestrians and to generally soften the visual appearance, these planted areas will also have seating edges. There will be a singular tree on the planter to the East nearest the road. This will ensure that views and the character of the building façade is maintained. Between the lock gates and this area, the post and chain which previously was used to defend a level change between the canal lock and the footpath has been removed and replaced with a seating edge. This will provide a tapping edge for users seeking to move along the Canal side of the park.

At the interfaces of the park with Portobello Harbour road and Richmond street south (ie the entrances to the space, tactile warning paving and drop kerbs etc have been proposed, the finer detail of these will be teased out at detail design.

**Cycle Movement**

Cycle movement within the park is still permitted via a share with care policy, every effort has been made to reduce possible conflict points and to create safe dedicated pedestrian movement routes. Cycle movement has been designed in a manner to help reduce speeds and those on bicycle will feel like they are visitors to a park. Within the wider context it should be noted that Bus Connects proposals have dedicated North South cycleway along Richmond Street South (R114), the Grand Canal Cycle Route is currently on the South Side of the canal which will likely become the permanent route taking the East West cycle movement. The Dublin Bike Stand, which was within the park, will be relocated to Lennox Street which is 90 meters away to the North. This area of Lennox Street is proposed to be closed off to traffic as part of Bus Connects. As a result of these more dedicated cycle facilities and provision around the park area, its likely that only local users or more leisure cyclists wishing to visit the park will be within the park area and number will be small.

**Conclusion**

Although the design for the park is not without it challenges, overall, the proposal will result in a huge transformation of the space which we believe will benefit all users, it will create a destination for local residents to rest and relax and also for the students using the language school and visitors along the canal and hotel. It will also ensure that active and passive recreation can take place and essential access and maintenance to the canal and buildings will not be compromised. Ongoing consultation through detail design and post construction with all stakeholders will be necessary to ensure that the park is functioning for all users.

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