

CORK STREET IMPROVEMENTS

ENVIRONMENT IMPROVEMENTS STRATEGY

1.0 Introduction

The recent insertion of an improved street corridor, in terms of a more efficient carriageway layout, has led to the creation of a virtually new townscape along the route corridor. Whereas the insertion of this new carriageway has produced a more rationalized vehicular movement system in the area, the opportunity to enhance the associated public domain i.e. the spaces created on either side of the roadway, has not been seized.

Mitchell and Associates were appointed by Dublin City Council to carry out the following tasks: -

- Analysis of the existing streetscape.
- The development of an overall concept for the environmental rehabilitation of the street having regard for the opportunities identified by this analysis.
- The definition of key design interventions in the street.
- The development of a coherent vocabulary of street furniture, planting and art installations.
- The judicious insertion of appropriate advertising elements into the street-scope.

The overall design intention is to create a cohesive street corridor, in visual terms, through the insertion of a palette of selected elements, whose repetition through the street corridor will provide an overall visual cohesion for the street. A basic requirement of the strategy is that no radical physical modifications to

the existing elements will be required, and therefore the proposed insertions will build on the streetscape already in place.

2.0 Analysis

The Cork Street corridor can be divided into three distinct sub-sections as follows: -

- 1) Dolphins Barn to Marrowbone Lane
- 2) Marrowbone Lane to Ardee Street
- 3) Ardee Street to the Coombe.

1) Dolphins Barn to Marrowbone Lane.

This section is the weakest section of the street corridor in urban design/visual cohesion terms. The space at Dolphins Barn itself is flanked by two and three-storey buildings of poor quality. The eastern end of the space consists of two cleared development sites, which afford long-distance views of the Guinness Complex at St. James Gate. The space is bisected by the north-east to south-west running corridor of the South Circular Road. To the west of this junction the street rises to the canal bridge at Dolphin Road. Enclosure to the street corridor at this point is extremely weak, consisting of one-storey buildings along the south-east side and open ground along the north-west side.

The Coombe maternity hospital with its young mature trees and hedge planting provides a “green” edge to the street corridor immediately to the east of Dolphins’ Barn. This is opposed on the north side of the street by a hard edge of two-storey terrace houses.

Huxley Crescent on the north side of the corridor is a small attractively – scaled enclave of housing with a green containing some young mature planting. Similarly Rilly Ave., Emerald Square and Emerald Terrace provide attractive small-scaled residential precincts giving onto the Cork Street corridor.

From Huxley Crescent Gardens to Marrowbone Lane, the visual quality of the building facades enclosing the street is extremely poor on both sides, creating an unattractive and disjointed urban landscape. This discontinuity is emphasised by the presence of three large development sites, two of which are located strategically at the junction of Cork Street and Marrowbone Lane.

2) Marrowbone Lane to Ardee Street

This section represents the most visually-cohesive part of the Cork St. corridor, in urban design terms. There are major development sites at the Marrowbone Lane and Ardee Street junction respectively, with a smaller site located to the east of Brickfield Ave.

The open spaces with mature tree planting which flank Cork Street to the north and south at the nurses home and Bru Chaomin respectively create a green pocket in this hard urban landscape and bring a sense of history and calm to this section of the street corridor.

To the east of this, the street is flanked to the north by a strong terrace of two - and three-storey buildings, rising to four storeys at the nurses home. While there are many modern interventions in this terrace there is also a significant number of historic buildings. An added feature is the presence of archways leading to backland areas, giving an added spatial dimension to the street corridor.

The south side of the corridor, by contrast consists of relatively poor buildings of more recent origin. The most prominent of these is the former Donnelly's factory rising to a height of three stories. The eastern section of this side of the corridor is marked by a total disintegration of the street enclosure,

consisting, as it does, of four-storey residential blocks, orientated at right-angles to the street, flanked by derelict development sites.

The junction with Ardee Street is defined by the disintegration of the built fabric surrounding it. This open aspect provides views into backland areas, and long-distance views towards the spire of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

3) Ardee Street to the Coombe

This portion of the Cork Street corridor is of extremely poor quality, urban design terms. Apart from the openness of the Ardee Street junction mentioned above, which awaits reconstruction, the combination of derelict sites and left-over areas creates an impression of a street running through a backland area of the city.

There is a large development site on the northern edge of the corridor adjacent to Ardee Street which is earmarked for residential use. Further to the east on the same side there is a terrace of houses at Weavers Street fronting onto the Cork Street corridor and separated from it by a two-metre high brick boundary wall.

Opposing this relatively cohesive piece of townscape is a terrace of stepped light industrial units with which are orientated to the south, away from the street, and present an opaque and forbidding facade to the street corridor. At the western end of this terrace Brabazon Road connects the street corridor with the new market space.

At the eastern end of this section the street corridor curves around to the north to connect with the Coombe, forming two open spaces at the junction. Adjacent to these spaces are two development sites, one of which is earmarked for an educational facility. The facade of the derelict Church of St. Nicholas Without provides a strong historic form back from the junction and is separated from the street corridor by a grassy bank and industrial railings.

The recent insertion of an expanded road corridor into the area, consisting of the asphalt carriageway itself, its flanking concrete footpaths and associated lighting, has created a series of unresolved edge conditions which, while being visually dysfunctional at the moment, offer the opportunity for significant design interventions in the street. Similarly the presence of so many potential development sites on both sides of the corridor offer further opportunities for the remaking of the enclosing facades, the creation of pedestrian open space, and the insertion of artworks at critical points in the streetscape.

3.0 Study Objectives

The following objectives were developed in consultation with the Dublin City Council project team. These objectives focused on the creation of a new vision for the street, which would act as a focus and connecting element for future urban renewal in the area. The main objectives can be stated as follows: -

- To encourage pedestrian movement along and across the street corridor
- To act as a catalyst in relation to the introduction of a set of desirable land-uses fronting onto the street – e.g. cafes, pubs, local shopping, etc.
- To facilitate the re-construction of street facades through the control of development sites fronting onto the street.
- To identify and provide for the insertion of a series of designed elements to provide a visual order and cohesion to the street corridor.
- To create new incidental pedestrian spaces, as pause points in the street corridor.

- To provide defined linkages to backland areas, side streets, adjacent residential enclaves, etc.
- To provide a “greening” of the street through the insertion of street tree planting.
- To provide a coherent “branding” for the area through the utilization of banners, temporary hoardings etc.
- To provide for pedestrian movement generally having regard for health and safety aspects, given the intensity of vehicular traffic on the street.
- To visually integrate existing open space into the street corridor.

The urban analysis outlined in 2.0 above, has identified opportunities for the remaking of the Cork Street corridor as a pedestrian-friendly enclave. A fundamental constraint in relation to the identification of key elements is the need to work within the physical framework laid down by the recent carriageway insertion. In other words, the proposed array of elements should not unduly interfere with the existing built environment, but should be applied to existing finished levels. This strategy serves to avoid significant construction work associated with the environmental improvements either locally or generally within the street corridor.

4.0 Conceptual Approach

The conceptual approach to the environmental improvements for the Cork Street corridor is based, as stated previously on the identification of opportunity within the existing structure and the insertion of a series of designed elements to provide a degree of continuity, as well as the identification of one-off sites as focal points of varying treatment.

The character of the insertions, being applied treatments to existing surfaces, localised insertions such as banner columns, litter bins, lighting etc., or temporary edge treatments to disruption due to development sites, will not impact adversely on the street corridor in terms of construction impacts. All the chosen elements can be easily inserted, if necessary on a phased basis.

The chosen typology of elements is as follows: -

- The insertion of street tree planting.

- Applied paving surfacing.
- The creation of mini plazas.
- The insertion of public art.
- Enhancement of existing green areas.
- Enhancement of existing lighting.

The range of proposed street elements is as follows: -

- Litter bins.
- Feature lighting.
- Banners.
- Seating.
- Bollards.
- Safety barriers.
- Bayside stands.
- Signage.
- Advertising panels.
- Temporary hoardings.
- Trellis systems.

In addition to the above, which will provide the three-dimension impact in the street corridor, a range of paving finishes will be provided, as follows: -

- Textured finish (bound gravel or equal) to existing concrete footpaths.
- Natural stone paving at selected locations.

- Modular precast concrete paving at selected locations.

The judicious insertion of appropriately-scaled advertising elements will add further interest to the street through the use of high-quality illuminated panels at the standard six-sheet size. Certain of these elements may also be used for community-related events and information.

5.0 Description of elements

The proposed environmental improvements will be distributed through the street corridor, as follows: -

a) Dolphins Barn to Marrowbone Lane

The junction at Dolphin's Barn and the South Circular Road can accommodate the insertion of twin mini-plazas on either side of the SCR.

Similarly, a small plaza could be inserted at the junction of Cork Street and Donore Avenue, as part of the proposed site development.

There is an opportunity for the provision of street tree planting between the Grand Canal and the SCR; as part of the site development flanking Ruben Street and along the south side of Cork Street between the Coombe Hospital and Dunmore Avenue.

Existing open spaces, at the Coombe Hospital and Huxley Crescent can be managed and interplanted to provide a visual softening to the corridor at these points.

b) Marrowbone Lane to Ardee Street

The major focii on this section of the street corridor is the opposing areas of open space at Bru Caomhin and the nurses home opposite. These could be opened to pedestrians with seating areas provided, and would form a much-needed green “lung” in the street corridor.

Development sites at the extreme ends of this section of the corridor offer opportunities for remaking the street façades. The development site at the south-west corner of the Ardee street junction could allow for the insertion of a small plaza with seating and other elements.

There is an opportunity for the insertion of significant street tree planting in relation to existing parking bays along the north side of the street, and incorporated into various development sites towards the east end of this section.

The industrial buildings flanking Brickfield Lane on the south side of the street could support a “greenwall” system for growing plants vertically on their relatively opaque facades.

c) Ardee Street to the Coombe

There is potential for the provision of street tree planting on both sides of this section of Cork Street, both in relation to development sites and fronting the

residential enclosure at Weavers Street and the opposing terrace of light industrial units.

Two small plazas flanking the entrance to Cork Street at the junction with the Coombe marking the entrance to the corridor, and would contain seating and signage , as well as relating to activities on the contiguous development sites.

There is also an opportunity to provide a setting for the ruined church of St. Nicholas, as viewed from the street corridor, through the hard-scaping of the open space.

6.0 Typology of Elements

A number of street furniture elements will provide a certain level of visual continuity within the street corridor, as follows –

- Banners will be provided at key focal points within the corridor and can be-used to “brand” the street and enhance its presence in the city.

- Perforated metal seats will be used at pause points within the corridor – mainly associated with the small plazas to provide rest-areas for pedestrians.
- Perforated metal litterbins to match with the seating, will be distributed through the street corridor. These may be free-standing or fixed to existing light standards.
- Stainless steel bollards will be utilized to define edges, and to prevent access by vehicles onto pedestrian precincts. These elements will be used sparingly to prevent visual clutter in the street.
- Pedestrian safety barriers will be used at crossing points in order to define these points. Stainless steel will be used to visually integrate with other street elements.
- Cycle racks will be in stainless steel for reasons of sustainability and visual compatibility with other elements.
- Local signage will consist of stainless steel finger-post signs indicating local street names, community facilities and points of interest in the general area.
- Advertising panels, as stated previously will be of six-sheet size, will be illuminated and will be cantilevered of single support.

Temporary hoardings to development sites will incorporate artworks or supergraphics, and will provide points of temporary interest within the street corridor.

Existing standard street lights could be modified to provide additional pedestrian lighting by changing the existing light source. This could happen on an incremental basis.

Feature light to pedestrian plazas would consist of 4 metre high standards using reflective uplighting to provide a more subtle lighting effect at ground level. In addition LED strip lights inserted in paving at selected points would provide a further level of interest to the night-times streetscape.

A proprietary 'greenwall' system utilising a wire mesh applied to façades would allow the 'greening' of the streetscape where there is no room for street planting within the corridor.