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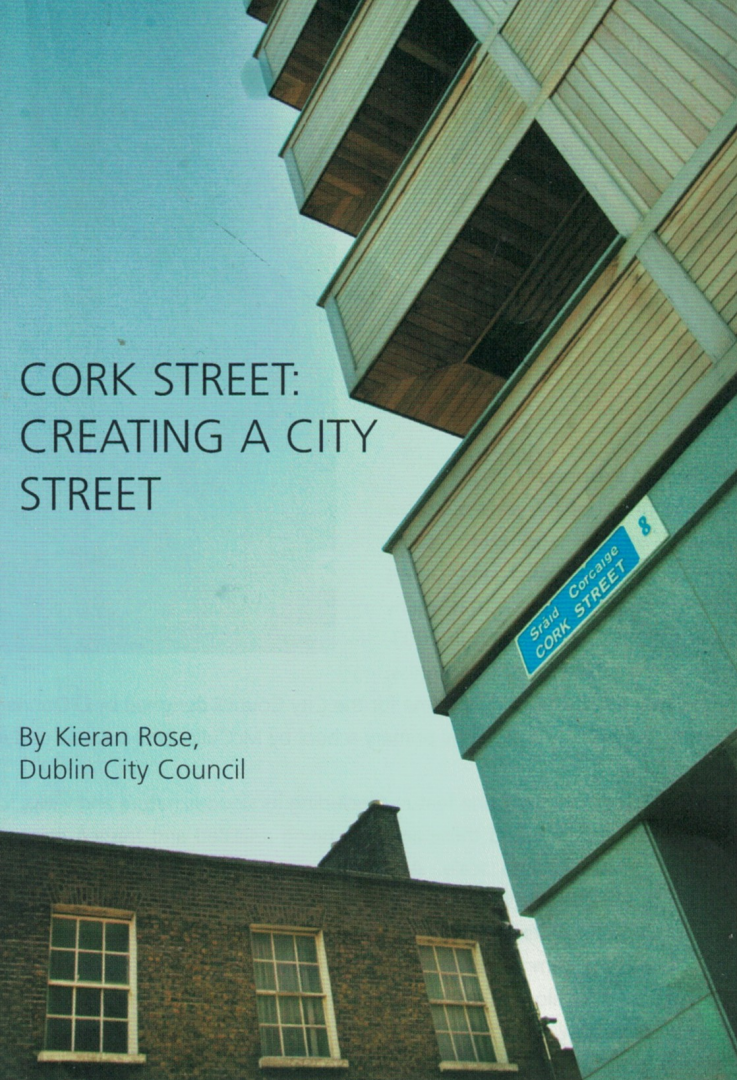
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REUBEN STREET APARTMENTS, REUBEN STREET, CORK STREET, DUBLIN · CONSERVATION AND
ADAPTATION OF A SHOP AND RESIDENCE, FRANCIS STREET, DUBLIN · TWO HOUSES ON JOHN DILLON
STREET, LIBERTIES, DUBLIN · MCGOVERN'S CORNER, CORK STREET/MARROWBONE LANE, DUBLIN

22

CORK STREET: CREATING A CITY STREET

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Dublin is a city of recreated streets and Cork Street is the last major street in the city to be (re)created. The delay in development has been positive in that it has allowed us to learn the lessons of elsewhere.

For decades Cork Street was disintegrating partly because of the 50-year-old road-widening proposal and, partly, because of the massive industrial dislocation and haemorrhaging of employment. By the 1990s, the street was characterised by swathes of dereliction.

Finally, after much controversy, a road-widening scheme was settled on and in 2002 Cork Street was widened to four lanes with two lanes reserved for a Quality Bus Corridor.



McGovern's Corner by HKR Architects

Rebuilding could now commence. Many of the extensive derelict and underutilised sites were owned by the City Council and briefs for the sale of these sites were prepared stressing quality issues such as spacious apartments, mixed uses, no apartments at street level, and high quality contemporary architecture.

The height of buildings became a contested issue. Dublin City Council took the strong view that it was vital for new buildings to be of a sufficient height to contain the considerable width (c 23-metres) of the new street. This also allowed for greater residential amenity, more spacious apartments with better views and more generous provision of open space.

As with the rest of the Liberties, Cork Street is characterised by its heterogeneity; great differences in scale, grain, use and building type. It ranges from single-storey shops and small two-storey terraced houses to the fortress-like Donnelly factory and fine, relatively tall Georgian and Victorian buildings. Instead of rigid height maximums or minimums, it was decided to set out performance criteria such as housing quality, architectural creativity, contribution to the public realm and mix of uses.

The City Council site on the corner of Reuben Street was designated as a landmark site; now the FKL building. There are times for planners to go for the radical option and take a carefully calculated risk especially when dealing with creative and serious architects and an enlightened developer. The building is now a dramatic feature on the street and, with a new incidental urban space and delightful finishes, it interacts with the street and the pedestrian in an uplifting way.

Image

One of the significant problems for the area (identified in the Integrated Area Plan) is its poor image, a mixture of 'Dublin in the rare old times', dereliction and social problems. This poor image and consequent low expectations can be a significant barrier to achieving high quality new development. One way to change the image of an area is to change the reality and this is happening; but it is also necessary to change perceptions, to promote and revalue Cork Street and the wider area in the city's consciousness. We set about this in a number of ways. We commissioned ARC to prepare *Imaging the Street*, a collection of images and descriptions of new developments. The City Manager's annual media day this year focussed on Cork Street and Dublin 8 and it resulted in significant positive media coverage. During the summer, the City Council organised a successful forum and exhibition on Urbanism that showcased the various developments in the Dublin 8 area and attracted significant numbers from the public, private and community sectors for a creative discussion.

Arts, Culture, Heritage

Partly as an aspect of revaluing the area and, partly, in recognition of the role of the arts and culture in urban regeneration, Dublin City Council commissioned the National College of Art and Design (on nearby Thomas Street) to carry out a series of student projects on the street. In the pre-application process, we encourage art features to be incorporated into new developments. The most high profile of these are the Felim Egan sculpture on the KMD/Castlepark building and the Corban Walker light sculpture on the FKL building.

In his illuminating study, *The Unfinished City: New York and the Metropolitan Idea*, Thomas Bender writes that "Modernity is a conversation with the past, and that past must be present". The City Council and the Heritage Council commissioned Shaffrey and Associates to prepare a Conservation Plan for St. Luke's, a church dating from c 1705, now derelict. The building was put on the market by the City Council with the Conservation Plan being the key criterion. The building is now to be renovated and occupied by Derek Tynan and Associates and Carraig; along with the innovative de Blacam and Meagher offices on nearby Hanbury Lane, this is another significant contribution to the growing creative industries cluster in the area. Many other historic buildings (including non-protected structures) have been renovated.



Building height on Cork Street is vital to contain the street's considerable width

High Ambitions

Cork Street and the wider area has one of the highest concentrations of disadvantage in the State. Many of the solutions to poverty lie in areas of social and economic policy, however, there is a significant role for planning and architecture. What people living in poverty and those on higher incomes want from an area is the same: good quality housing, good parks, good schools, good shopping facilities, a Public Library, a swimming pool, 'clean streets' and 'safe streets'. It is not rocket science; the challenge is to deliver this quality of life.

In a recent assessment of programmes to combat social exclusion, NESC uses a great phrase that "low ambitions achieve low outcomes". The corollary is that high ambitions achieve high outcomes and this should be a mantra for all planners and architects. You can see clearly the impacts of low and high ambitions in the physical environment. Numerous surveys have highlighted how young people in disadvantaged areas are keenly aware of the quality of their surroundings and they identify poor environmental quality as a serious negative which can compound their low self-esteem and aspirations.



Felim Egan sculpture on the Castlepark building by KMD Architecture



A Street in Progress

The first phase of the project is now coming to an end with some developments occupied and others almost complete; given that many applications were submitted in 2003, this is a formidable pace of progress.

In addition, a social housing scheme for the City Council designed by O'Donnell Tuomey is underway and a new primary school by McCullough Mulvin is under construction.

Cork Street has many fine features including its sinuous nature and views to St. Patrick's Cathedral and these are now being revealed and framed by new buildings of appropriate scale. A street improvement programme (after a scheme by Mitchell and Associates) providing for tree planting, granite paving, new lighting and seating is being implemented by developers and by the City Council with the commitment of two million euros. There are still many large development sites along the street, some at planning or pre-application stage. The objective now is to use the current high quality of development as a platform to deliver more creativity and more quality and public gain in the next phase.

A Post-European City?

Cork Street and the wider Liberties area has huge potential for progress, great inherent resources as well as a heritage of disadvantage to be resolved. Nearly every single large site is likely to be redeveloped and so the Liberties has a crucial role in the future of the city. There is the potential for the population to double to 50,000. A major national project, the Digital Hub, an IFSC for the 21st century, is on Thomas Street. This is a 100/200 year historic opportunity for the Liberties to be transformed into one of the most liveable, socially inclusive and exciting city areas. One example is the realistic opportunity to provide a much needed public park, emulating Patrick's Park, a model of 19th century regeneration.

We live in a world, fast forwarding to the future at unprecedented speed, of relentless global competition. Policies that do not respond to these fundamental challenges are likely to be counter-productive or, at least, fail to optimise the new opportunities. Irish economic policy has been hugely ambitious and successful; in its continual evaluation and radical changes (through Forfás and NESC); in responding to new opportunities and delivering unprecedented economic growth; and in ensuring that we are adapting quickly and competing effectively at a global level. As people concerned with city making, we should benchmark ourselves in terms of this best practice; in continual reconsideration of policies and in the achievement of these global and high ambitions. Our aspirations for the city formed in the 1980s and 1990s in such fundamentally different circumstances should be rigorously evaluated today. Modelling ourselves just on European cities, ambitious in its time, may not be as productive in 2006. As Paul Kearns puts it, Dublin is "now oddly unique, with pressures and opportunities unparalleled in Europe", and asks the question: "Does Dublin have the ambition and courage to fulfil its possible destiny as the first post-European City? A 'Global City', An 'Open City', A 'City of Immigration', A 'Multi-Cultural Diverse City', A 'City of Excellence, a global player in setting new models for a confident reinterpretation of itself and its future?" The only limit is our ambition and determination to succeed.