

THE HISTORIC AREA REJUVENATION PROJECT PLAN

The Historic Area Rejuvenation Project (HARP) Framework Plan was initially prepared in 1996 for an area comprising 109 hectares in the north west inner city which had long suffered years of neglect and decay. This Plan had a number of antecedents including the Dublin City Development Plan, the Urban Renewal Tax Incentives 1986/1994, the Dublin Transport Initiative 1995, and an outline HARP Plan submitted to the Department of the Environment in 1994.

Subsequent to the introduction of the 1998 Urban Renewal Scheme and Guidelines for the preparation of Integrated Area Plans (IAPs), it was determined that the HARP Framework Plan met all the criteria required of an IAP. It was believed that the adoption of the Plan as an IAP would help secure the success of its strategies.

The Plan itself is directed by a project team in the Dublin City Council and overseen by a monitoring committee comprised of representatives from the Local Authority, the community and business interests. It began by highlighting the importance of community consultation (discussed later), then provided both an analysis of the central issues involved in the renewal of the area and the strategies to be undertaken in response to them. It also focused on harnessing the strengths of the area, specific projects to be implemented and opportunities that should be exploited. According to the Plan, the central issues of the area were:

1. Land Use & Investment
2. Quality of the Built Environment
3. Urban Design
4. Movement & Transport
5. Socio-economic Issues
6. Tourism
7. Conservation
8. Recreation & Culture
9. Residential

Main Issues:

1. Land Use & Investment

A Land use Survey of Dublin's inner city was carried out by Dublin Corporation during 1993/1994 that emphasised the three strong functional sectors of the HARP area - retail, market and legal. It also highlighted the weaknesses by recording the location and extent of dereliction and vacant sites.

The retail sector is focused to the east of the HARP area around Henry Street and Mary street whilst west of Capel Street there is a shift of dominant land use towards wholesale in the markets sector. Further west, the legal sector has a very strong presence around the fulcrum of the Four Courts. Moving westwards again, in 1993 at least, one would then encounter the post-industrial vacancy of Smithfield before finally arriving at the area dominated by Collins Barracks.

2. Quality of the Built Environment

Analysis of maps from the mid-nineteenth century shows that the area developed a physical form which remains largely intact, albeit in a degraded state. However such analysis fails to take into account the huge decline in socio-economic felt by the people in the area within and between the walls of this built environment.

A survey of the physical environment, referred to as a 'Blackspot Analysis' was carried out in 1996 that found that there was much evidence of dereliction and dilapidation especially to the west around Smithfield and North King Street. It also found that a poor quality standard of the public domain existed in the form of paving, street furniture and lighting. This added to traffic congestion, pollution and residential complexes badly in need of repair meant that it was extremely difficult to attract any investment into the area.

3. Urban Design

According to the Plan, the urban design approach undertaken for the HARP area 'is based on the belief that the quality of a place does not derive solely from the attributes of the physical environment but also refers to the liveability which results from the interactions between the buildings and the uses and movements supported by these buildings'.

The Plan's approach stressed the importance of:

- (a) Context - every effort must be made to respect and conserve the existing urban arrangement
- (b) Permeability - places, buildings and their functions must be made more permeable and transparent to pedestrians; streets must be reanimated and humanised.
- (c) Coherence / Legibility - space must be provided that is more coherent and legible by infilling gap sites, carefully designing the public domain and respecting the historic pattern of streets.

4. Movement & Transport

A survey of the transportation situation in the HARP area highlighted the following problems:

- Severe congestion on the main routes through the area
- Environmental degradation on Capel Street due to traffic

- 'Rat-running' through Smithfield and the Markets
- Conflict between pedestrians and traffic
- Lack of cycle facilities
- Lack of facilities for the disabled
- Disruptive and excessive on-street parking

5. Socio-economic Issues

One of the key aims of the HARP Plan is to regenerate the area in a sustainable manner. In order to do this one must not only physically rejuvenate the area but also stimulate social and economic regeneration.

Economically the HARP area west of Capel Street is reliant on fruit and vegetable importing and distribution, constituting 30% of commercial activity whilst retail and merchants comprise 25%. Yet other parts of the area are seriously under-performing as the economic base of small-scale, labour-intensive industry which previously sustained the community has been eroded. This contributed to a 22.7% decline in population in the area in the late 1980s.

6. Tourism

The Plan found that despite its proximity to tourist attractions and routes, the HARP area has failed to develop a significant tourism sector. Reasons for this included a lack of integration into mainstream tourist routes, few ancillary facilities such as hotels, a perception that the area was unsafe and poor standards of the public domain in particular and urban design in general.

7. Conservation

The HARP area contains a wide range of historical buildings and architectural treasure with huge contrasts in character experienced over short distances, from the insular Collins Barracks through the 'open-minded' space of Smithfield to the Georgian splendour of Henrietta Street. This necessitates a range of conservation approaches to be implemented rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. The Harp Plan set out to create a proper balance between conservation and redevelopment, minimising unnecessary conflict by being clear about the objectives of conservation whilst still allowing for positive tensions to arise between the two, thereby adding to local architectural character.

8. Recreation & Culture

The Plan found that the HARP area was isolated from both the conventional and avant-garde cultural life of the city with very few art galleries, no state-sponsored art institutions and precious little public sculpture in the area. Potential was recognised in the plans to convert Collins Barracks into the decorative arts division of the National Museum, the amenity value of the Smithfield marketplace and innovative Ormond Multimedia Centre on

Ormond Quay. The Plan also recognised the central importance of community-based expression and realised that any future cultural innovation must consider the integration with the local community.

9. Residential

Until the early 1990s, residential development within the HARP area focused entirely on the provision of social housing. The early 1990s saw a flurry of construction activity triggered by tax incentives, mainly confined to the provision of new private apartments, leading to a 47% increase in the population between 1991-1995. This has led to a significant demographic shift as the new residents are highly mobile, single professionals. Their transience, added to the insular nature of the new developments and the lack of diversity in household types ensured that there was little socio-economic impact on the existing, settled community amongst whom long-term unemployment, lack of education and single parenthood are commonplace.

Strengths of the HARP area:

An analysis of the area concluded that its following strengths should be harnessed:

- The HARP area's strategic location close to the heart of the city centre
- The open relationship of the area to the river Liffey
- The strong retail, market and legal functions of different parts of the area
- Cultural and tourist attractions such as Collins barracks or St. Michan's church
- Spaces and places with potential such as Smithfield and the area's many small parks and squares
- The diversity of historical and architectural riches between the localities
- A number of well-maintained and clearly defined residential quarters
- The opportunities presented by many vacant and derelict sites
- The future provision of Light rail (LUAS) through the area

Strategies for Renewal:

The overall strategy of the Framework Plan is based on creating four local cells within the HARP area, each with a strong sense of place, range of functions and local character. This strategy represents a flexible, area-based approach that can respond with tailor made policies to the needs of each local cell. The four cells are the Retail Cell, the Market Cell, the Smithfield Cell and the Collins Barracks Cell.

This central strategy is bolstered by a number of sub-strategies based on responding to the main problematic issues of the area:

The Land Use/Uneven Investment Strategy: To promote and expand the major functional sectors; to promote mixed use within each cell, especially along the LUAS route; to redevelop North King Street and Smithfield based on specific urban design principles.

The Environment/Urban Design Strategy: To improve the quality of the public domain, especially around Smithfield; to develop an east-west pedestrian link; to improve existing parks and spaces; to make positive use of landmarks and civic buildings.

The Movement/Transport Strategy: To implement the North King Street road system, including the new Liffey bridge; To create environmental traffic cells; to provide safe routes for pedestrians; to provide a traffic management system for the Markets area; to maximise the potential of the LUAS light rail system.

The Socio-economic Strategy: To encourage community involvement in, and benefit from, the renewal effort; to work with local groups on an area-based approach to tackling unemployment; to provide opportunities for education and training.

The Conservation Strategy: To implement a range of conservation approaches within each cell; to carry out surveys of historical buildings; to integrate conservation with urban design and to maximise the use of existing building stock.

The Tourism Strategy: To promote new attractions such as the new museum at Collins Barracks and the proposed Whiskey Museum at Smithfield; to encourage new tourist facilities in the area; to improve the physical appearance of the area.

Specific Projects:

The HARP Plan then outlined a number of projects that would lead the regeneration process. These included overall efforts to link the separate cells together such as the North King Street Urban Corridor, the east-west pedestrian link and the provision of the LUAS.

It also comprised more specific projects within each cell including:

- the Blackhall Street Civic Space and the new Museum in the Collins Barracks cell
- the Smithfield Civic Space and a site at 150-8 North King Street in the Smithfield cell
- the creation of a new Civic Space near St. Mary's Abbey in and the upgrading of the markets in the Markets cell
- the 'Living Over the Shop' scheme and the conservation of Henrietta Street in the Retail cell.

