

In Focus: McGarry Ní Eanaigh Architects

Michael McGarry and Siobhan Ní Eanaigh have been working together in their Drogheda studio since the mid-1980s, when the economy was faltering and conservation was losing out to unnecessary demolition. After some residential projects in the countryside they became part of Group 91 - the groundbreaking association of innovative architects which masterminded the renewal of Temple Bar in Dublin from 1991 onwards.

Since then many of their projects, such as the Museum at Mellifont Abbey in Louth have been on a larger, more public, scale yet never losing sight of the human dimension of architecture. Here we look at two of their projects that have been built within the HARP area - the Smithfield Civic Plaza and the Liffey Boardwalk.

Smithfield Civic Plaza

In 1997 Dublin Corporation sponsored an international design competition for the regeneration of the space at Smithfield, which was then long neglected and had fallen into misuse as a ad hoc car park. It is the largest open space in Dublin with about 13,000sq m. The Council wanted 'a design which would establish Smithfield as a major civic space in Dublin City for the 21st century'. It was hoped that the new space could be used for a variety of public events such as outdoor concerts and markets.

McGarry Ní Eanaigh won the competition and the space was officially opened in early 2000. According to the architects their design 're-establishes and makes legible the particular proportion of Smithfield'. It does this using surface and enclosure: the surface is comprised of a slow curve of cobble and granite slabs whilst the enclosure is provided by a small pavilion to the south and most strikingly by an array of twelve 26.5m-high lighting masts to the west. These gas braziers give Smithfield a presence on the skyline of Dublin, a dramatic reference point for this new civic space. The new plaza is a flagship project for the area and has subsequently won many urban design awards.

The Liffey Boardwalk

The Boardwalk was the brainchild of Dublin Corporation City Architect's Division and originated in 1997 as a new 650 metre long pedestrian route, which would reintroduce Dubliners to the river and provide relief from the traffic chaos of the north quays. The north-side location has the enormous benefit of being south facing and not overshadowed. It represents a major new amenity from which to enjoy the Liffey, acting as a viewing point for events on the river and it complements the Millennium Bridge. There is a high level of illumination on the boardwalk at night due to the installation of a custom lighting scheme.

Conceptually the Boardwalk is a continuous promenade and the design intention was therefore to maintain its continuity where interrupted by the existing bridges. Connections at the Halfpenny Bridge, O'Connell and Grattan Bridges are all immediate. At the Millennium Bridge the preference of the bridge's designers was respected, resulting in



the Boardwalk being held back some metres 20 on both sides. It was opened officailly on the 17th of December 2000.

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