

The Markets Area: Background

The wholesale nature of the Markets area is going through a process of transformation. Inner-city congestion, logistical changes and the need for centres of distribution with direct access to national and regional routes is forcing a re-examination of locational criteria among a number of major firms in the area. At the same time, the under-utilisation of the Fish Market in its current form calls for a reappraisal of the nature of the present facility and presents the opportunity for its relocation within a new, modern premises geared more towards the promotion of fish produce and situated in the Markets area. These changes call for public and private interventions to harness the potential of the markets area and to create a vibrant new retail market, with a consolidated wholesale provision aimed at the needs of the inner-city restaurant / catering / food / retail trades as the focus of a new city quarter. Building on the creation of a vibrant, new retail food market, which is one of the objectives contained in the Brief for Consultants (March 2001), an opportunity now exists to rejuvenate this part of the city to create sustainable employment, leisure, cultural and residential opportunities.

If in addition to this dynamic change of use of the wholesale markets - a phenomenon now normal in most European cities due to problems of transport and access in expanding urban settlements - we add the construction of LUAS, the light rail system carrying up to 7,000 passengers per hour along Chancery Street, then it is obvious that new perspectives for the area are now due. It is obvious that the generator of activity and its consequent urban form has been for many decades, or even centuries, the wholesale markets in this area of Dublin. Any radical change of use would weaken Dubliners sense of identity of their city so the initial consideration is to find a similar use, and exchange the present warehouses and storage sheds for a form representative of a certain shift of emphasis to accommodate a similar activity.

Any observation of European market towns and cities would show us a market place, or square, many of which would contain a covered market somewhere within this space. In many cases this covered space would be the undercroft of the meeting hall of the town councillors or an Exchange providing facilities to draw up the contracts made in the market place. Thus we find squares with market halls within this space. Here in Dublin we have the market without the square. Given that the surrounding sites of the Vegetable and Fruit Market are generally warehouse sheds, as well as the underused Fish Market, it seemed that a unique opportunity existed to create the Market Square as a dignified setting for the Market Hall itself. Apart from introducing a metropolitan space, equivalent to Montjoy Square, and thus re-introduce a well known urban form characteristic of Dublin City, it will act as an iconic reference for citizens half way between O'Connell Street and the rejuvenated Smithfield.

The present distance between O'Connell Street and Smithfield of 1,700 m is too long for a mental and physical connection between Smithfield and the economic and social activity that is slowly moving up river. This new square would provide the idea stepping stone between the two.

Another important layer of activity was long ago generated by the building of the Four Courts in 1786 by the architect James Gandon. There is therefore an interest of the legal sector in this area for both large and small office accommodation.

By concentrating the repair to the urban fabric around the existing Fruit and Vegetable Market, the rest of the area with its rows of two storey dwellings housing strong local communities, Municipal housing blocks and certain courtyard activities need not to be disturbed. Decisions on any further changes can be taken when the time comes.

The Markets Area: The Idea

The basic idea is to create a new square 130 m x 130 m equivalent to 17,000 m², containing the existing Fruit and Vegetable Market building 60 m x 100 m equivalent to 6,000 m². Mary's Lane and Arran Street East would allow restricted vehicular access to the pedestrian square while St Michan's Street would be upgraded to be part of the pedestrian area. The existing Fish Market would be demolished and its cast-iron support structure re-used to provide supports for canopy covers for outdoor markets and other activities in the Square. A reduced activity of the wholesale Fruit and Vegetable Market could be accommodated at the northern end of the existing Market. The Fish Market will be accommodated in a new building to the South of the Fruit and Vegetable Market facing Chancery Street. The East side of the Market

will be extended to accommodate Market Workshops to replace the existing accommodation along the West side of Arran Street East. The first stage will be built on the Flower Market site and then when circumstances permit the Southern stage.

The new Market Square will be contained by several 6 storey 16 m wide buildings with a common façade on the West, North and East sides. The South side facing Chancery Street will be partly enclosed with a wing of the West side building turned to face Chancery Street but with a two storey porch - St Michen's Foyer - allowing a street level view into the Square.

Below the Square two basement levels will be provided for 515 car parking spaces for both the new Fish Hall and Fruit and Vegetable Market. The Fruit and Vegetable Market will form the covered part of the Square and will be adapted to the changing uses. Within the existing structure 1,330 m² will be reserved for the continuing activity of a wholesale market situated at the Northern end. Vehicular access will be either directly from Mary's Lane or from the loading and unloading bays situated in the basement at the Southern end with a goods lift to the ground floor. The proposal contemplates a gradual reduction of wholesale activity vacating by stages from South to North given the necessity to situate the new Fish Market Hall along Chancery Street.

The rest of the existing market will contain a free multi-use space of 2,600 m² for occasional markets and other activities. This space will be surrounded on three sides with 1,852 m² of retail accommodation. Above this another 1,800 m² will be available for retail, restaurants and administration, together with a large stepped terrace on the South side overlooking the market/entertainment space.

The market is connected with a goods lift to a basement at the Southern end with 855 m² for storage and bays for loading and unloading. Two direct access stairs and lifts connect with the public parking beneath the Square on the West side.

The Fish Market Hall to the South has a ground floor area of 780 m² with an upper floor of 585 m² and a basement for loading and unloading, storage and parking of 2,300 m². A 20 m turning circle for vehicles is also included within this basement.

On the East side the Market has been extended to include workshops, 1,140 m² at ground level, which could incorporate another 400 m² within the Market building itself. Two upper levels and a basement would add another 3,300 m² approx.

Behind the façades of the buildings surrounding the Square are a series of Courts. Although the Court concept is proposed, these should be flexible to adjust the form to uses other than residential should this be required. The proposed densities should be kept.

Rather than identifying each block with letters it is suggested that former uses and names be used instead.

Moving around the Square in a clock-wise direction, the Western building on the present Fish Market site would be St Michen's Court. On the North-West corner would be The Brewery Court, then between George's Hill and Halston Street the existing Convent and School will remain with the hope that in the future, the precinct could be remodelled to retain its educational purpose, while adding some cultural dimension. This allows the existing fabric to intrude and not be excluded from the Square.

The North-East corner is formed by the southern edges of two courts, The Old Potato Market Court and Petticoat Court. In between and straddling Little Green Street is a bridge building carrying the façade of the Square along Mary's Lane. On the East side the Abbey Courts are formed by a building split into two parts to allow the inner court a direct connection with the Square. Within the courts of this city block only single to four storey buildings will be allowed and arranged so that there is a pedestrian permeability. These interior spaces provide a link North-South from Mary's Abbey Street to Little Mary Street. It would be interesting for this pedestrian permeability to continue South to Strand Street Little. Apart from this, note should be taken to reproduce the plan of the Cistercian Cloister of the former Abbey of St Mary's founded in 1139 in its original position in the pavement pattern. An important operation concerns the Bank premises on the corner of Capel Street with Little Mary's Street as the

present building - of no architectural merit - now blocks the view into the Market area from the important Henry Street shopping mall. If this could be rebuilt with an arcade at street level Little Mary's Street could be almost aligned with the Henry Street axis and allow wide pedestrian pavements on either side encouraging an easy access to the Market Square.

Cuckoo Lane should be widened North of the Brewery Court to allow a new domestic public space to connect St Michen's Park with the historic St Michen's church. This itinerary would eventually affect the convent on George's Hill if it were to be developed one day in the future, but on the other hand will provide an amenity for the residents in this neighbourhood.

It will be seen from this description of the proposal that the repair and renovation of the Market area is concentrated on the formation of a Square to provide a setting for both the Fruit and Vegetable Market building and the new Fish Market. This allows the early work to replace sheds and warehouses and some small properties without disturbing the present population of residents.

To compensate for the generous provision of public space a high density is contemplated of slightly more than 3.00 m²/m² over the net area of the new site limits. In time the impact of the new Square will obviously affect the value of the adjoining properties, so it will be prudent to place any thought of further repair and renovation on hold until the occasion demands attention.

The construction of Luas along Chancery Street provides the key motive for acting now to recreate this new urban identity for the centre of Dublin. With its long tradition of Markets it would become the ideal centre for fruit, vegetable, fish and other foodstuffs including specialist and ethnic food products, flowers, restaurants, cafes, etc. Add to this the clear demand for offices and workspace for the legal and other professions, small businesses and entrepreneurs and the current demand for 1, 2 and family sized apartments and live-work units, then the impetus for change is now at hand.