

RE: Planning application 3617/21

To whom it may concern,

We as An Rabharta Glas – Green Left are writing to give our submission on planning application 3617/21 and through providing our observations on this particular application, the reasons for why we are asking the planning department of Dublin City Council to reject this planning application in its entirety.

We have provided the €20 fee as requested.

The observations that we will make in this process relate to the following

- The historical fabric and protected nature of the buildings, specifically number 77: The Cobblestone
- The cultural significance of the Cobblestone bar
- The Local Development Plan and how this application breaches the parameters of same
- Dublin City Council's Corporate plan
- The National Planning Framework

1. **The historical fabric and protected nature of the buildings, specifically number 77: The Cobblestone**

We support the submission of the Georgian Society in relation to the scale and inappropriate and unsympathetic design of the proposed new hotel contained in this application. Furthermore, we note that these structures are already protected. We do not see enough information from the applicant to suggest that they have put enough mitigation measures in place to retain the integrity of the protected structures. We would assume that there was a pre-planning process with the planning department of Dublin City Council. Therefore, it would appear to us from the documentation provided by the applicant that this pre-planning process was not used efficiently given the protected nature of the existing structures. Should this application subsequently be granted permission by Dublin City Council **this would represent a serious diseconomy and inefficiency in delivering planning services to the general public.**

Specifically, number 77 which is a commercial premises which would be particularly adversely affected by this development is on the Register of Protected Structures (RPS) under reference number 4263. The applicant appears to be taking an unusual interpretation of the *Planning and Development Act 2000* insofar as it relates to section 57 which governs structures and land on the RPS. We include this below with emphasis added on the relevant sections for consideration:

“structure” means any building, structure, excavation, or other thing constructed or made on, in or under any land, or any part of a structure so defined, and—

(a) where the context so admits, includes the land on, in or under which the structure is situate, and

(b) in relation to a protected structure or proposed protected structure, includes—

(i) the interior of the structure,

(ii) the land lying within the curtilage of the structure,

(iii) any other structures lying within that curtilage and their interiors, and

(iv) all fixtures and features which form part of the interior or exterior of any structure or structures referred to in subparagraph (i) or (iii);

It appears clear to us that due consideration of the curtilage of this development has not been given in this instance and the lack of mitigation or consideration to this end, or indeed the deliberate omission of this aspect in the applicant’s documentation, signals to us a lack of interest, at best, in preserving the heritage in the fabric of these structures.

2. The cultural significance of the Cobblestone bar

The Cobblestone Bar has been operating in the Smithfield area since 1850. This represents an anchor institution in the area serving as an intergenerational focal point. The business was taken over by Tom Mulligan over 3 decades ago and his management of the institution focused on creating a destination venue for music lovers both nationally and internationally as well as a location for education and musical practice.

Were this an art centre or other cultural institute there would be no question of this application even being entertained. In the experience of some of our members as traditional music practitioners, the issue is that this particular cultural institute is a pub, which through holding a session every evening is a place of craft and traditional music and dance practice. There is a systemic undervaluing of the session as a site of traditional music dissemination, rehearsal, conservation and practice. The traditional music tradition does not live in theatres or recordings, it springs from an aural tradition in which the session is integral. A traditional Irish music session is a place where musicians both preserve local variants of traditional Irish music practice and share music practice as part of the aural tradition of the practice. Undoubtedly, to us, The Cobblestone is a culturally important site to the Dublin tradition as well as being a site from which many international proponents of the art form have brought Irish music and dance to international audiences. We would argue as such, that the Cobblestone itself is an anchor institution for the aural tradition and therefore is invaluable on a national level.

What must be understood about the Irish music tradition is that it is aural in dissemination and that there are regional varieties which each must be protected. There is also an intangible connection with place in the tradition. While these places tend to be preserved in rural settings and contexts, there are very few institutions in Dublin that act as anchor institutions for the Dublin tradition which is in and of itself worthy of active support and preservation by the planning authority, in this instance, the council.

Younger musicians who will form the next generation of practitioners will often begin public playing careers in sessions and will develop their practice in the aural tradition from these cultural sites. There is also a great tradition in the Cobblestone relating to Uilleann pipe playing in particular. The loss of a venue that is low-cost, and in which sessions traditionally take place everyday is as corrosive to the tradition of Irish music and dance as the closure of any other artistic or cultural site. There are increasingly fewer locations that would be described by the Trad community as being anchor institutes in the tradition; there must remain one that specifically caters for the tradition in Dublin as an urban centre with its own specific regional variation on the tradition.

By that same token, the Uilleann pipes have been recognized by UNESCO as forming part of the “intangible cultural heritage of humanity”¹. Yet the continuation of this art form would be irreversibly damaged should this venue be impacted **in any way whatsoever** that would prove detrimental to providing cultural space for this instrument and the aural tradition surrounding it. We are asking that this institution be preserved **by any means necessary by the state** given international recognition of the importance of intangible in cultural heritage.

3. The Local Development Plan and how this application breaches the parameters of same

The overarching approach of the existing Dublin City Development plan is ‘A sustainable, resilient Dublin’. As part of this high-level goal there is an emphasis on Cultural/Built Heritage. Namely:

Making provision for cultural facilities throughout the city and increasing awareness of our cultural heritage and promoting safe and active streets through the design of buildings and the public realm.²

This application will result in a reduction in cultural facilities, particularly on the northside of the city which is already underserved in this regard. This will also, for the reasons outlined above and in other submissions, result in a reduction in the production and development of internationally recognised practitioners of our cultural heritage; thereby undermining this specific goal which is one of five high-level inputs into the high-level goal of the entire development plan. From a planning perspective this is not in line therefore with the Development plan in its entirety, before even discussing the built fabric of the structures and how they fit into the urban fabric of the area in general as thoroughly outlined in other submissions focusing on the architectural issues with this application.

Furthermore, Dublin City Council in delivering priorities 2.4 and 3.1 of the Cultural Strategy³ which flows from the Development plan have identified The Cobblestone as part of Dublin City Council’s Cultural Audit and Map. This development, detrimental as it is, runs entirely counter to this strategy.

Further explicit policies of the Council set out in its own plan⁴ which would be contravened are the following under policy objective 11.2.5.2 Protecting and Enhancing Dublin City’s Cultural Assets:

¹ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/uilleann-piping-01264>

² Page 13. Dublin City Development Plan 2016–2022: Written Statement

³ <https://www.dublincitycouncilculturecompany.ie/content/images/Dublin-City-Council-Cultural-Strategy-Document-2016-2021.pdf>

⁴ Pages 204/205 <https://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/2020-08/written-statement-volume-1.pdf>

CHC34: To support and promote opportunities for everyone to participate in the city's cultural life by facilitating the provision of effectively-managed, self-sustaining cultural infrastructure suitable for all ages at the neighbourhood level, including regeneration areas, that is accessible to all in the locality and reflects the identity of Dublin's neighbourhoods.

CHC37: To protect and support Dublin city's existing cultural assets by facilitating the enhancement and/or growth of existing cultural spaces, including performance and entertainment spaces, while protecting the existing amenities of an area.

CHC40: To support existing, and encourage the growth of emerging, cultural clusters and hubs in the city, which bring together cultural activities with supporting uses such as restaurants, retail outlets etc. to create vibrant and innovative cultural experiences

4. Dublin City Council's Corporate plan

Objective 6 of the Dublin City Council Corporate plan relates to sustaining a "vibrant cultural life"⁵. The Priority objective in this instance is to "Celebrate and promote the history, culture and literary traditions of the city to build on their value to the city's identity, to society and to the economy". It could not be argued based on the designs that the applicant has submitted that this plan constitutes "best practice" as outlined in the corporate plan as it relates to the adaptive use of historical buildings nor would the detrimental impact on the The Cobblestone as a cultural centre constitute a planning decision in line with the priority objective to, "Support and encourage the provision of arts and cultural facilities to ensure that the cultural life of the city has the space to thrive".

5. The National Planning Framework

The application that is being adjudicated on does not comply with objectives 17 or 60 of the national planning framework⁶, namely:

National Policy objective 17: Enhance, integrate and protect the special physical, social, economic and cultural value of built heritage assets through appropriate and sensitive use now and for future generations.

National Policy objective 60: Conserve and enhance the rich qualities of natural and cultural heritage of Ireland in a manner appropriate to their significance.

⁵ Page 40 <https://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/2020-06/dublin-city-council-corporate-plan-2020-2024.pdf>

⁶ Page 162 <https://npf.ie/wp-content/uploads/Project-Ireland-2040-NPF.pdf>

In Conclusion

The Applicant has not provided enough evidence in their documentation to suggest that they have considered fully the impact of these works on the built and cultural heritage of the area. They have not efficiently used the planning process provided to ameliorate for the provable damage that would be caused on a structural and cultural level to the fabric of this area. The plans are not in line with any of the already democratically mandated frameworks of the local development plan and the cultural strategy that flows from same. Nor is this plan in line with the National Planning Framework. On these grounds we are submitting that this application must fall as it is not in line with sustainable planning for Dublin City.