Developing a New Urban Quarter at Grangegorman, Dublin: The Role of Planning in its Successful Delivery

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INTRODUCTION TO THE GRANGEGORMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Grangegorman development represents a significant urban regeneration project of 29 ha. (73 acre) of underutilised land in Dublin’s inner city. It will deliver important facilities that underpin national and European infrastructural needs, addressing education, health, the arts, community facilities and student accommodation, in addition to sports and recreation.

The Grangegorman development relocates, on a phased basis, the Dublin Institute of Technology’s (DIT’s) c.40 buildings on dispersed sites within Dublin City to a single campus. It also provides health facilities for the Health Service Executive (HSE), in addition to community and recreational uses and commercial development.

Planning has played a critical role in the delivery of the campus and in securing Government support for the project. This paper describes the role of planning in the delivery of this major inner city regeneration project.

The Grangegorman Development
HISTORY OF THE GRANGEGORMAN SITE

The Grangegorman site has been in institutional use since the Richmond Lunatic Asylum (the Lower House) was opened in 1814. Initially the asylum aimed to deal with patients whose mental illnesses were considered to be treatable and a high quality of accommodation and environment was provided (GDA, 2011a). However by the 1820’s a change in legislation gave rise to overcrowding in psychiatric institutions. A penitentiary building (the Clocktower), was opened on the site in 1816. Both buildings were designed by Francis Johnson and today are signature buildings on the site. In 1897, due to rising demand for space by the asylum, the penitentiary was taken over for hospital use and became part of the asylum complex (GDA, 2011a).

By 1836 the lands on the west of the Grangegorman site were purchased for use as recreational gardens for the benefit of the patients of the asylum. On sites of this nature, both dominant religions were represented and a Catholic chapel (1850), and Church of Ireland chapel (1860) were built. Male and female infirmaries were constructed in the 1850s. Another large scale building (the Male House) was built in the centre of the grounds over the years 1848-54, followed in 1866 by the Female House. Laundry and mortuary buildings followed in 1895-1900. These buildings, all protected, add character to the site and are at the heart of its redevelopment.

The population of the asylum rose from c.300 patients in 1850’s to c.2,000 patients by the 1940’s. In the early 1980’s, the site was still in active use as a psychiatric institution with c.800 patients residing on the site. The use of the site declined after the implementation of the new Irish mental health policy, Planning for the Future (Dept. of Health, 1984). Under this policy, residents living on site were relocated into community based housing. Up until the implementation of Planning for the Future, the site was a hub of activity, with people living and working on site, daily patients and visitors, sports activities and other events. From the mid 1980’s, activity on the site diminished, accompanied by the demolition of many buildings. By 2006, the number living on the site had reduced to just over 100. A new replacement health facility, the Phoenix Care Centre, opened in February 2013, accommodates, amongst other services, c. 35 long term residents, reflecting the change in mental health policy.

Grangegorman in the 1950’s
HEALTH SERVICES ON THE GRANGEGORMAN SITE

Until recently, the health services delivered from the Grangegorman site have been accommodated within buildings that were dilapidated and in many cases no longer fit for purpose (GDA, 2011a). The annual Mental Health Commission Report in 2009 expressed concerns over the standard of accommodation available at the time. It noted in relation to St. Brendan’s Hospital that it ‘continued to be of concern to the Inspectorate that residents remained accommodated, cared for and treated in such unsuitable premises’ and that ‘the building that houses the secure units is old and unfit for purpose and should be closed as a matter of urgency’ (MHC, 2009, p.46). Because of this, the Commission recommended that further admissions should not be facilitated in St. Brendan’s Hospital.

The physical condition of the buildings on the site compromised the delivery of health services and replacement and additional facilities are required to serve the local catchment. Delivery of new health facilities has commenced with the opening of the Phoenix Care Centre. A Primary Care Centre is scheduled to open on the site in 2015, with a Community Nursing Unit to follow in 2016. Health care services to be delivered from the Grangegorman site will broadly comprise provision for mental health care and primary, community and continuing care, provision for older persons and for people with disabilities, catering for a catchment area ranging from the local to North Dublin and the greater North East Region (GDA, 2011a).

THE DUBLIN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

DIT currently caters for 10% of the higher education sector in Ireland. In the 2012/13 academic year DIT had over 18,000 students on accredited programmes with over a further 2,000 on other programmes (HEA, 2013). Student numbers are continuing to grow creating demand for additional facilities and space.

DIT was formed as a corporate body by legislation in 1992 by the amalgamation of a number of separate colleges. On establishment, DIT inherited the buildings occupied by the six constituent colleges located on six separate campuses across Dublin City. The floor area of the new Institution was restricted as was the land area of circa 4 hectares (DIT, 2007). At the time of its establishment, the Institute had no playing pitches, recreational areas, student residences or industry centres and there was inadequate staff accommodation and minimal space for cross-Institute services (DIT, 2007). Because of the demand for space to deliver its functions, the number of locations from which DIT operates had increased to c. 40 by 2010. The dispersed location of its activities has not allowed the Institute to achieve its full potential (DIT, 2007). Lack of efficiency has arisen from duplicate activities, services and modules. The Grangegorman campus will provide DIT with the necessary spaces, infrastructure and environment to achieve its full potential and strategic aims. It will support its anticipated designation as a Technological University of Dublin in 2016/17 in collaboration with two other Dublin based Institutes of Technology in Tallaght and Blanchardstown (HEA, 2012).

Initial thinking on the establishment of the Institute in the early 1990’s had been focused on consolidating DIT’s activities on 3 separate sites in Dublin City, including Grangegorman (STW, 1998). It was anticipated at the time that c.50% of the Institute’s activities would locate at the latter site. A subsequent internal review and capacity analysis recommended the relocation all of the Institute’s activities to Grangegorman, developing the site at a ‘city building’ scale. This recommendation was supported by two Government decisions of 1999 and 2002. The Government decision in 2002 acknowledged the capacity of the Grangegorman site to accommodate both the requirements of DIT and also the then Northern Area Health Board (since amalgamated into the HSE) and other Government projects of a small scale, paving the way for the current Grangegorman project..

THE GRANGEGORMAN DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

The Grangegorman Development Agency (GDA) was established under the Grangegorman Development Agency Act, 2005, to procure the overall development of the Grangegorman site. The 2002 Government decision concluded that the vehicle for the delivery of the development would be via a single task development agency, established under an Act of the Oireachas. The GDA’s overall
function is to plan, procure and project manage the development in an integrated and sustainable manner, for handing back to DIT and the HSE. (GDA, 2011a).

The Grangegorman project involves planning for and implementing a multi-phased development that can provide for:
- a high quality city quarter with strong physical linkages to the surrounding city.
- quality health care facilities.
- an urban campus for all of the DIT activities, including academic buildings, craft training facilities, sports facilities, student accommodation, and research and development.
- arts, cultural, sports, recreational facilities and public spaces to serve the community and the city.
- a primary school.
- a co-located public branch library with the DIT main library on the site.
- complementary retail and commercial development. (GDA, 2011a)

DEVELOPING THE PROJECT VISION

The project vision is key to the success of the Grangegorman development. The vision found expression in the Grangegorman Masterplan 2008 and the Grangegorman Planning Scheme 2012. The latter is the key statutory policy vehicle to deliver the Grangegorman development.

The project vision sees the campus developed at a ‘city building’ scale, at an urban density, with urban streets, squares, quads and spaces (GDA, 2008). The scale and density reflect the urban setting and contribute to sustainability while utilising the economic potential of the site.

The objective is to create a new city quarter with a high level of accessibility. The campus will be largely pedestrian, opening it up to the local area and city and connected to the city centre by Luas Cross City (GDA, 2011a).

In terms of land use, the site will be developed with a varied mix of uses; education, health, residential, community, recreation, leisure, science and technology, commercial research, incubator accommodation, comprising a total of 380,000 sq. m. of development.

The Protected Structures, create a sense of history and place and give the Grangegorman development identity and character. The objective is that the protected buildings on the site will find new appropriate uses, which will safeguard their long-term future.

DEVELOPING A PLANNING STRATEGY

An important element in securing the delivery of the development has been the devising of a comprehensive, positive and responsive planning strategy for the site. The strategy involved the following:

- development of a masterplan.
- wide stakeholder consultation.
- the designation of the site by Government as a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ).
- the adoption and approval of the Grangegorman Planning Scheme 2012.

The SDZ designation of the site lead to the approval of the Grangegorman Planning Scheme 2012 by An Bord Pleanala in May 2012, paving the way for the commencement of development.

THE ROLE OF THE CITY PLANNERS AND THE CITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

From the outset, the vision for the Grangegorman site has been supported by Dublin City Council in the Dublin City Development Plan 2005-11, and the Dublin City Development Plan 2011-17. The site was designated for strategic development and regeneration in both plans (as a Framework Development Area in the 2005-11 Plan and as a Strategic Development and Regeneration Area and a Key Developing Area in the 2011-17 Plan). The support of Dublin City Council has been critical in delivering the project vision.
Key objectives for the development of the site were set out by the planning authority. The objectives stress linkages (physical and economic), physical integration, urban scale, community gain, urban character, integration of Protected Structures, sustainability, appropriate mix of uses and high quality development. (Dublin City Council 2005, Dublin City Council 2011).

The objectives were subsequently integrated into the Grangegorman Masterplan 2008 and the Grangegorman Planning Scheme 2012.

View of The Fields
THE GRANGEGORMAN MASTERPLAN 2008

The multi-award winning Grangegorman Masterplan 2008 developed the urban design vision for the site. The Masterplan was commissioned by the Grangegorman Development Agency and was prepared by a team led by Moore Ruble Yudell Architects and Planners and DMOD Architects (GDA 2008).

The urban form devised in the Masterplan focused on the creation a new urban quarter, creating boulevards, a cultural garden, two ‘hearts’, ‘green fingers’ and public plazas. The urban form allows for the integration of Protected Structures, new buildings and landscape, key views and the historic resources of the site. It aims to create a sense of place and give the new Grangegorman development identity and character (GDA, 2008).

The development will break through the high stone walls that surround the site with modern interventions that respect their protected status. Public entry to and enjoyment of the new urban quarter is promoted. The campus will be open to all, forming a new part of the city.

Connecting the Grangegorman Site to the City

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THE GRANGEGORMAN PLANNING SCHEME 2012

The Grangegorman Planning Scheme seeks to translate the Grangegorman Masterplan into a clear and achievable planning strategy.

Planning schemes are a unique mechanism in the Irish planning system. Grist notes how the 2000 Planning and Development Act introduced a new planning concept, the Strategic Development Zone, where a streamlined planning process would operate (Grist B., 2012). The Grangegorman site was designated a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) by Government in December 2010 in recognition of its economic and social importance to the State. The site was designated an SDZ for the provision of ‘schools and other educational facilities, community facilities, including hospitals and other healthcare facilities and services, facilities for the elderly and people with disabilities, childcare facilities, residential (including student and private), commercial activities (including leisure and retail facilities) and sport and education facilities’.

Once designated, a draft Planning Scheme was prepared by the GDA in consultation with the planning authority. The draft scheme was put on public display after which it was placed before the local elected representatives for adoption in July 2011. The Planning Scheme was subsequently appealed by four parties to An Bord Pleanala for determination. An Bord Pleanala approved the Scheme in May 2012, c.18 months after designation of the site as an SDZ.

The Grangegorman Development Agency took the view that the advantages of delivering the development via a Planning Scheme would be considerable. Because of the lead-in time to the Grangegorman development since the first Government decision in 1999, there was clarity on the educational and health requirements to be delivered on the site. The Grangegorman Masterplan provided the Vision upon which to develop the Planning Scheme. In the context of the Irish planning system, a Planning Scheme can lead to considerable time savings in securing planning permission and creating certainty for stakeholders in terms of both timing of delivery and to the development proposed in the SDZ. The Scheme allows for the delivery of the Grangegorman development in a timely manner. It has also been devised to allow sufficient flexibility to respond to changing revenue streams.

The Grangegorman Planning Scheme 2012 is also unique in a number of respects:

- It represents the first Planning Scheme in Ireland prepared by a body other than a planning authority, having been prepared by the Grangegorman Development Agency. Implementation of the Planning Scheme now lies with Dublin City Council.

- It comprises a unique mix of uses for a SDZ, based predominantly on education and health uses.

- The site was the first designated Strategic Development Zone in Ireland in a city rather than a greenfield setting. A second Planning Scheme in Dublin City, for the North Lotts & Grand Canal Dock SDZ area, has since been approved by An Bord Pleanala.
The Key Structuring Principles below illustrates Fixed Elements of the Planning Scheme that must be delivered (DCC, 2012). These are: The Gateways to the site, the east west routes through the site, the Green Fingers, the two ‘Hearts’, the academic quads and The Fields.

Key Planning Scheme Structuring Principles

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

The Grangegorman site is located in a part of Dublin City that has experienced high levels of social and economic deprivation (Exodea Europe, 2009). The objective is that the development of the campus will provide community gain and urban regeneration. In addition to construction employment, a significant number of downstream and ancillary developments, new businesses and related employment is anticipated (Exodea Consulting, 2013). The increased footfall in the area is likely to result in a range of new service businesses, accommodation and recreational businesses being established in the area.

The Grangegorman Labour and Learning Forum was established in 2010 with the objective of ensuring that the local community benefit in terms of the employment, educational and other opportunities arising from the development. The Forum is made up of the key stakeholders from the local area, comprising a range of diverse organisations representing community, employment, education / training, business, government, local employment services. The focus is to develop a cohesive, coordinated approach to delivering employment and educational opportunities. The Forum works collaboratively with the community on educational and training projects.

A Grangegorman Employment Charter has been developed and put in place (GDA, 2012). The purpose of the Charter is to ensure that the community benefit from employment opportunities that arise. The Charter seeks to ensure that a minimum of 20% of new jobs created on projects will be on offer to the local community and that 10% should come from the long term unemployed.

SUSTAINABILITY

In itself, the development of a brownfield/infill inner city site is inherently sustainable. New buildings to be constructed will largely be narrow plan, naturally lit/ventilated and orientated around south-west facing quads, which will result in energy efficiency and reduced carbon emissions. New academic buildings will achieve an A3 rating. A site-wide district heating piping system is under construction. Not only maximum, but minimum building heights have been set for development, safeguarding the
scale of the development. The Protected Structures will be given a new lease of life. However, challenges continue to arise in funding the additional up-front costs that are required to achieve sustainable buildings.

Walking, cycling and public transport will be the dominant forms of transport to and from the site. (GDA, 2012). Luas Cross City will connect the site to the city centre and beyond by the end of 2017. Limited on-site parking (1,150 spaces) will be available. The existing modal split in DIT is positive and the aim is to maintain and improve upon this to reduce travel by car to 7% (GDA, 2011b). This will pose a challenge, as the existing DIT sites are located in the city centre close to public transport and will require concerted mobility management.

CONSULTATION

From the beginning of the Grangegorman project, one of the central aims has been that the project would be inclusive both in its planning and implementation (GDA, 2011a). Extensive consultation has taken place with all stakeholders including the local community, the wider community, local business interests, statutory bodies, the local authority, Government Departments etc. It is an aim of the GDA that the local population feels a sense of identification and ownership over the new Grangegorman (GDA, 2011a). Communication with local residents is achieved through meetings, information sessions, emails, quarterly newsletters, website, social media and letter drops in addition to the statutory Consultative Group consultation as set out in the Grangegorman Act, 2005. In acknowledgement of the limitations of statutory Consultative Group, a Community Liaison Committee has been established, with widespread representation, which meets monthly. Membership includes community representatives, stakeholders, local TD’s and elected representatives.

DELIVERING THE DEVELOPMENT – SUPPORT OF GOVERNMENT

The benefits of the Grangegorman development have been recognised by Government in designating the development as a Government stimulus project. In July 2012 the Government introduced its Capital Investment Stimulus Package and announced that the Grangegorman Project would be a ‘Flagship Project’. Through this and other programmes, over €300 million worth of investment will be developed on the site by September 2017, including two academic quads which will accommodate 11,000 students via public private partnership. This is will, in turn, generate substantial additional private investment in delivering student housing, science and technology, retail uses etc.

THE ROLE OF PLANNING

The role of the planning has been key to the development of a planning and development strategy for the site, the delivery of the project to date, and the safeguarding of the future success of the project.

Of particular importance has been the decision to seek the designation of the site by Government as a Strategic Development Zone and the development and adoption of the Grangegorman Planning Scheme 2012. This approach to planning the delivery of development on the site selected for a number of reasons;

- To secure the Grangegorman Masterplan 2008 vision.
- To secure engagement and collaboration with stakeholders.
- To secure planning consent for individual building phases in an efficient and timely manner, allowing for optimal implementation and delivery of the overall development.
- To create certainty for stakeholders, government and private funders.

The support of Dublin City Council Planning Department, both through the Development Plan and in providing input in the drawing up of the draft Planning Scheme, has been critical to the evolution of the project.
The speed with which planning consent can be achieved for the development under the Grangegorman Planning Scheme 2012 has played an important role in securing Government Flagship Project status and associated funding for the project.

CONCLUSION

The Grangegorman development will lead to the creation of a new city quarter in Dublin to the benefit of the local and wider city community. It will unlock an isolated, poorly accessed, underutilised site, allow DIT achieve its strategic aims, provide modern fit-for-purpose health facilities, in addition to creating community gain. It will lift an area experiencing deprivation and act as a catalyst for economic and social regeneration.

The planning strategy adopted has played a valuable role in the success of the project to date. It has led to the formulation of an award winning masterplan with widespread stakeholder support, ensured certainty and security in the delivery of the development due to the planning strategy employed.

The Strategic Development Zone designation and associated Planning Scheme provide an pro-active approach to the development of a unique site in a sustainable manner. The Planning Scheme ensures the timely and orderly delivery of the development. The planning strategy has played an important role in safeguarding and achieving Government support for the project.
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