



## **Building Heights Review:**

### **North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock Planning Scheme**

**18 April 2019**

*Dublin Chamber is in favour of changing the building height guidelines with a view to allowing buildings of greater height in the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock scheme, ensuring that the finite amount of development space that is available in the core city centre is maximised. Dublin Chamber believes that allowing taller buildings in the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock area can help deliver high density living in a well-serviced area which features high-quality transport links and a vibrant business community.*

#### **Introduction**

Dublin Chamber welcomes the Building Heights Review for the Planning Scheme of the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock area. We recommend that Dublin City Council change the height guidelines for the SDZ with a view to increasing the amount of accommodation available in the area. Dublin needs to engage in ambitious city planning with the goal of ensuring high density in the city centre. This is vital if Dublin is to avoid repeating the mistakes of past planning which have led to an unwelcome level of urban sprawl. The Urban Density and Building Height Guidelines, which were put into effect in December 2018 by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, were a welcome development given the goal of higher density living in Dublin and Ireland's other cities, as laid out in the Ireland 2040 plan. The close proximity of the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock to the heart of the city makes the area a perfect location for taller buildings. Dublin Chamber believes that failure to approve a change to height guidelines, in an area that so well exemplifies the criteria for which the new guidelines were introduced, would be a negative indication of their wider potential for success in enabling core density.

#### **Height**

Dublin Chamber is in favour of taller buildings in Dublin, but only where appropriate. This view is well documented in official submissions to Government. We believe that there are areas of

the city that lend themselves well to increased height.<sup>1</sup> The docklands skyline is one that has evolved significantly over recent decades and this evolution continues today. A significant amount of height has already been successfully introduced into the Grand Canal area, including the Google HQ building (a 15 storey office block), the Montevetro (a 15 storey residential building), the redevelopment of the Bolands Mill site, and the EXO Building, which will become the tallest office building in Ireland at 17 stories when it is completed in the coming months. All of these buildings are well suited to their surroundings. It is important to note that the area is far removed from the historic Georgian core and more sensitive historic areas of the city. This need to be respectful of historic city centre buildings is something that was set out in the initial Grand Canal and North Lotts SDZ Planning Scheme assessment criteria for high buildings.<sup>2</sup>

Dublin Chamber recommends a review of building height for the area in question while highlighting that it is not the only means of achieving core density, nor should it be solely relied upon. Copenhagen has a core density twice that of Dublin but with building heights only one to two stories higher. Moreover, it has incorporated these building heights in a city with a focus on public realm and a sense of place.

### **Connectivity**

Dublin Chamber has long advocated that large-scale housing developments in particular, as well as commercial developments, need to be built in close proximity to good public transport links. The North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock area is a prime location for high density development, achievable in part through increased height, because it has good transport links already in place. The site is within reach of a number of bus routes, including the 56a, 77a, 1, 84n and 47 on the Grand Canal side and will be well served in the future by BusConnects as it is set to be included along a City Centre Core Bus Corridor. It is also served by the Dart line, via the Grand Canal station, and within the vicinity of a number of Dublin Bikes stations, including Hannover Quay, Benson St, Barrow St, South Dock Road and Grand Canal Quay.

Meanwhile, the North Lotts area is well-served by way of the LUAS Red Line and will in the future benefit from MetroLink infrastructure. The right development in the Grand Canal and North Lotts area can help support the case for extending the Luas Red line to the Docklands area. This probably will not be feasible based on the number of units planned for Poolbeg

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<sup>1</sup> Dublin Chamber [http://www.dublinchamber.ie/DublinChamberofCommerce/media/banners/Dublin-Chamber\\_Urban-Development-Building-Height\\_20-09-18.pdf](http://www.dublinchamber.ie/DublinChamberofCommerce/media/banners/Dublin-Chamber_Urban-Development-Building-Height_20-09-18.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Dublin City Council Grand Canal & North Lotts SDZ Appendix 5  
<http://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/content//Planning/OtherDevelopmentPlans/LocalAreaPlans/Documents/NLPlanningSchemeInterimPublication.pdf>

West SDZ alone. Grand Canal and the Quayside is an area of the city with functioning cycling infrastructure and there is scope for further improvements in the coming years.<sup>3</sup>

The areas in question are crucially also within 20 minutes walking distance of Grafton Street on one side of the river and O'Connell Street on the other. The delivery of the much-needed, but sadly much-delayed, Gut bridge, which will allow public transport, cyclists and pedestrians to travel over the mouth of the Grand Canal, will significantly enhance access in this area. This connectivity ensures the long term viability and vibrancy of high density developments of housing and of business facilities.

### **Place-Making**

Dublin Chamber has long argued that urban planning needs to consider place-making and the public realm and that density through utilisation of height needs to be achieved with this as a goal. For the Grand Canal Dock area there is already a sense of public realm at the water's edge, which has a vibrant cultural, business, consumer and residential scene. The area is home to the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre, a myriad of cafes, shops and restaurants a mix of business including the tech and legal sectors, and residential units.

North Lotts and East Wall is soon to benefit from an influx of new business premises. Earlier this year, Salesforce announced its intention to increase their employee numbers by 1,500 over the next 5 years, with these jobs based in a Dublin Docklands campus.<sup>4</sup> The new Salesforce building in North Lotts is already underway. Office space is in high demand in the area, Q1 2019 saw the highest uptake of Dublin office space ever recorded according to CBRE Ireland, with three of the 49 transactions accounted for through large lettings by Salesforce and the Central Bank.<sup>5</sup> These welcome new commercial presences will add to the vibrancy of the area but will further necessitate increased housing capacity.

### **Wider Policy Impact**

Dublin Chamber expressed its support to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government for its then draft changes to building height guidelines last September. While the *Urban Development and Building Heights* guidelines for planning authorities were much

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<sup>3</sup> Irish Times April 2019 <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/liffey-cycle-route-selected-after-seven-years-of-plans-1.3848116>

<sup>4</sup> RTE.ie January 2019 <https://www.rte.ie/news/business/2019/0118/1023962-jobs-salesforce-dublin/>

<sup>5</sup> RTE.ie April 2019 <https://www.rte.ie/news/business/2019/0409/1041581-cbre-office-take-up-report/>

welcomed, we expressed concerns around potential blockages to its implementation in the review process at local authority level.<sup>6</sup>

This review of a prime location for higher height allowances is a litmus test for whether the new guidelines will be allowed to have a positive impact on Dublin's urban planning. As described above, the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock area is ideally suited to a review in favour of higher buildings and increased density. If this review fails to increase limits, it does not bode well for the implementation of the new guidelines by local authorities. It would also be a negative indication for the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP), as this similarly prioritises strategic residential and employment development based on density, a goal that requires facilitation through the review of building heights.<sup>7</sup>

The initial assessment criteria for mid and high rise buildings in the Grand Canal Dock and North Lotts SDZ plans reflected a need for public realm improvements and connectivity that has been well met. A change of the planning guidelines to allow higher buildings for increased density will further facilitate the best possible development in the area.<sup>8</sup>

### **Recommendation**

Dublin Chamber recommends that Dublin City Council review the building height limits to increase its allowance for the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock area. The area in question benefits from strong public transport links as well as a vibrant business and residential community. Its distance from the Georgian core and close proximity to the Poolbeg SDZ mean that new buildings of increased height will assimilate well to the landscape and contribute to the goal of core density for Dublin.

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<sup>6</sup> Dublin Chamber Submission on Building Height Guidelines September 2018  
[http://www.dublinchamber.ie/DublinChamberofCommerce/media/banners/Dublin-Chamber\\_Urban-Development-Building-Height\\_20-09-18.pdf](http://www.dublinchamber.ie/DublinChamberofCommerce/media/banners/Dublin-Chamber_Urban-Development-Building-Height_20-09-18.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Dublin Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2018 p14-15

<sup>8</sup> Dublin City Council Grand Canal & North Lotts SDZ Appendix 5  
<http://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/content//Planning/OtherDevelopmentPlans/LocalAreaPlans/Documents/NLPlanningSchemeInterimPublication.pdf>