



## **Submission to OPW on the Phoenix Park Visitor Experience Strategic Review**

**May 2019**

Dublin Chamber welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Office of Public Works (OPW) in respect of the Phoenix Park Visitor Experience Strategic Review. Dublin Chamber is the largest Chamber of Commerce in Ireland. Representing 1,300 businesses throughout the Greater Dublin Area, its membership covers all sectors and crosses the business spectrum from SME to large MNCs, employing 300,000 nationally. The Chamber is committed to making Dublin a better city in which to live, work, and do business.

The Chamber recognises the importance of the park as an integral part of the city and as belonging to the people of Dublin. Phoenix Park is home to institutions, recreational facilities and wildlife. It adds significantly to the recreational life of the city and provides a place of relaxation and sanctuary, a vital piece of urban infrastructure that is often overlooked. It is used daily by thousands of people, both visitors and city residents.

Dublin Chamber supports OPW initiatives to improve and enhance Phoenix Park's facilities and to identify future opportunities for its development. We welcome the ambitious nature of the draft review, particularly the proposed developments in transport and improvements to connectivity between the city and the park. We also acknowledge the challenges faced by the OPW in working to develop the park while preserving its history and character. Preservation of the park as a recreational facility for future generations is paramount, and the development of services within the park must be complementary to its core function.

Dublin Chamber regrets that, despite requests, we were unable to obtain a copy of the full review. As a consequence, this submission is based on the 'Draft Executive Summary'.<sup>1</sup> Access to the full draft review was only available for view in the Phoenix Park Visitor Centre. Dublin Chamber notes that this restriction was not in keeping with the spirit of the review which aims to further integrate the park with the city and to make it more accessible.

The park's primary function as a public space needs to be the focus of any strategic review and redevelopment. The Chamber notes the lack of engagement with the public in establishing these initial plans and believes a full public consultation process should be undertaken. The park needs to be open to new ideas and allow the people of Dublin to have input into the form and function of all aspects of their park.

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<sup>1</sup> Draft Executive Summary of Phoenix Park Visitor Experience Strategic Review, <http://phoenixpark.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Executive-summary-optimised.pdf>

## **Inter-connectivity and transport**

While the enclosed walls of the park protect and create a unique atmosphere they also isolate the park from its surroundings. There is a distinct opportunity for the park to open up to new audiences by increasing sustainable and public transport options to enhance connectivity. Currently the park is accessible through car and pedestrian entrances, and has a noted primary orientation towards the private car. Since 2010, there has been a trend of increasing modal share for sustainable transport modes, i.e. walking, cycling and public transport, with consistent annual increases. In 2018 this figure peaked at 70%, its highest level since 2006.<sup>2</sup> Correspondingly there has been a year-on-year decline in car usage.

### *Pedestrians and cyclists*

Dublin Chamber notes that the park has a range of successful companies on site that rent bikes and Segways. According to the Canal Cordon Report, cycle numbers have increased by 153% on 2006 levels.<sup>3</sup> It is vital that Phoenix Park takes advantage of this significant increase by providing the appropriate facilities for cyclists. Dublin Chamber notes the significant success of the DublinBikes scheme across the city which has 66,763 long term subscriptions per year.<sup>4</sup> The location of DublinBike stations within or at entrances to the park would improve its permeability and connectivity with the rest of the city.

Transport is constantly evolving. The growing usage of e-scooters across the city has been accompanied by official confusion regarding the legality of their use; however an enclosed area like Phoenix Park might create an ideal area in which to trail new innovations.

Dublin Chamber is fully supportive of the plans to build a pedestrian and cyclist bridge to link the National War Memorial Gardens to the Phoenix Park at the site by the UCD Boathouse. This long-mooted connection point across the Liffey will integrate the two important green spaces, and should significantly increase visitor numbers to the War Memorial Gardens. In its 2016 Conservation Management Plan, the War Memorial Gardens highlighted public access as a key issue facing the facility.<sup>5</sup>

### *Public Transport*

An enhanced integrated visitor experience will require development of improved public and sustainable transport infrastructure, without which the park will remain somewhat disconnected from the city. Dublin Chamber supports the proposed public transport projects such as the new internal bus route and the opening up of the Phoenix Park tunnel train line with a new train station located within the park. These will provide credible transport alternatives and reduce the need for visitors to drive to the park, while also opening up the park to a wider audience of visitors.

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<sup>2</sup> Canal Cordon Report, 2018, [https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Canal\\_Cordon\\_Report\\_2018.pdf](https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Canal_Cordon_Report_2018.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Canal Cordon Report, 2018, [https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Canal\\_Cordon\\_Report\\_2018.pdf](https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Canal_Cordon_Report_2018.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Dublin Bikes, Latest Figures, <http://www.dublinbikes.ie/Magazine/Reports/Just-Eat-dublinbikes-latest-figures>

<sup>5</sup> The Irish National War Memorial Gardens, *Conservation Management Plan*, 2016, <http://phoenixpark.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/WM-CMP-PDF.compressed-1.pdf>

The Draft Executive Summary makes reference to the development of Future Transport options such as driverless vehicles. This shows the ambition of the park to create unique experiences and attract more visitors. Dublin Chamber recommends that all new transport facilities should be sustainable, using the latest in green technology and powered by carbon-neutral and emission-free energy. Hybrid trains and buses are currently being introduced to the city by Irish Rail and Dublin Bus respectively. The use of electric, hybrid and hydrogen-powered buses in London is expected to reduce emissions by 84%.<sup>6</sup> This ambition should be replicated in Dublin. The Phoenix Park route could be used to trail new emerging innovations such as Ireland's first hydrogen fuel cell bus. As well as being necessary to support the shift towards a low-carbon economy, an emphasis on sustainable transport would also echo the ethos of the park and strengthen its public image.

### *Private Car*

As new methods of sustainable and public transport are introduced to the park, the need for the private car should reduce. The park needs to embrace its role as a hub for sustainable transport in all its forms. Dedicated car park facilities should be reduced to reflect the changing needs of the park, prioritising bike parking and coach spaces. Existing car parks at the Visitor's Centre, Lord's Walk, Farmleigh and the Papal Cross need to be upgraded with the latest electronic vehicle charging points.

Reference is made to the need to address the car parking issues that occur during large scale events in the Park. Dublin Chamber is not in favour of the development of mass car parking facilities in the park. Rather, more needs to be done to remove the necessity for private cars in the park and the priority should be enhancing sustainable and public transport options. Users of the park should be encouraged to leave their car at home if possible. Phoenix Park may wish to consider 'Park & Ride' solutions through agreement with outside parking companies and facilities. Integrated ticketing should also be considered for large scale events, with shuttle buses running from nearby transport hubs.

### **Development and retail opportunities**

Phoenix Park attracts 10 million local and international visitors annually. While Dublin Chamber supports the investigation of possible new retail opportunities in the park, any new services need to be complementary to the current uses of the park, e.g. cafés and restaurants. The Chamber would advise against reducing the current amount of green space in favour of retail facilities. New retail options should be considered within the footprint of existing building complexes, such as the Fort.

Revenue generated in Phoenix Park, whether through retail or events, should be re-invested in the park and surrounding area. In identifying new business opportunities for Phoenix Park, the OPW may wish to consider the approach of Centennial Park in Sydney. Centennial Park has an open and transparent process for access to commercial ventures within the park lands. It welcomes and encourages new business opportunities to be brought to their commercial team for consideration.<sup>7</sup> The park should be a haven of innovation and

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<sup>6</sup> London.gov.uk, *Cleaner Buses*, <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/environment/pollution-and-air-quality/cleaner-buses>

<sup>7</sup> Centennial Park, *Business Opportunities*, <https://www.centennialparklands.com.au/About-us/Business-opportunities/Current-opportunities>

sustainability, and businesses who share those values, whose ideas are sympathetic to the park, should have the opportunity to pitch their concepts to the park for consideration.

The Summary review indicates that there are extensive plans for retail facilities to be developed within the Park, while opportunities should be investigated to enhance the overall park experience there is a need for reflection on the space these retail facilities would be placed in and constraint in determining which opportunities will progress. Retail on a larger scale has the potential to damage the ethos and unique atmosphere of the park and detract from its primary focus.

The Phoenix Park Visitor Experience Strategic Review, which was funded by Phoenix Park's strategic partner Fáilte Ireland, has a clear focus on the visitor experience and aims to enhance the park's contribution to Ireland's tourism offering. Dublin Chamber supports initiatives to develop and improve tourism facilities, while bearing in mind that the primary function of the park must be to serve as a place of recreation and enjoyment for the residents of Dublin. As Dublin's population grows, preservation of existing greenspaces will be vital to ensure that it stays a healthy and vibrant city offering a high quality of life to all.

## **Recommendations**

- The OPW should prioritise development of integrated sustainable and public transport options to improve connectivity between Phoenix Park and the wider city, including rail, cycling, and walking infrastructure.
- Public transport developments should be sustainable, using the latest in zero-emissions technology, while also sympathetic to the park's history and character.
- The Chamber supports the proposed ambitious public transport projects, including the new internal bus route and the opening up of the Phoenix Park tunnel train line with a new train station located within the park.
- DublinBike stations should be located within or at entrances to improve the permeability of the park for thousands of Dubliners.
- The Chamber supports construction of a pedestrian and cycling bridge linking the National War Memorial Gardens to the Phoenix Park at the site by the UCD Boathouse.
- A balance should be achieved between improving accessibility and reducing car permeability.
- Existing car parks at the Visitor's Centre, Lord's Walk, Farmleigh and the Papal Cross should be upgraded with the latest electronic vehicle charging points.
- Phoenix Park should work with outside parking companies and facilities to encourage a 'park & ride' model to solve the issue of parking at large scale events.
- New retail opportunities should be developed within existing footprint and not overly impact on the current level of green space.
- Revenue generated in Phoenix Park should be reinvested in the park and surrounding area.
- Businesses should be encouraged to approach the park with appropriate business opportunities for consideration.
- A new extensive public consultation process should be undertaken to allow the people of Dublin have further input into the review.