



Submission on the Consultation on options for public realm improvements to Dame Street as part of the College Green Project

January 2021

Dublin Chamber welcomes the opportunity to respond to Dublin City Council's proposed options for public realm improvements to Dame Street as part of the College Green Project. This consultation comes at a critical time for the city centre and the businesses and sectors in these spaces. The Covid-19 crisis has had a devastating impact on Dublin's city centre and the businesses located there. As the restrictions are lifted and the economy reopens, it is important to ensure an attractive, accessible, and vibrant city centre so that businesses can bounce back and thrive.

Dublin Chamber is the representative body for businesses in the Greater Dublin Area, with a cross-sectoral membership spanning the spectrum from small start-ups to major multinationals. The Chamber is committed to improving the city's business environment and quality of life in tandem, and strongly supports a vision of Dublin with sustainability, urban density, and liveability at its core. Dublin Chamber supports intelligent pedestrianisation and recognises the potential benefits of the College Green Plaza project. In response to this consultation the Chamber has actively engaged over the last number of weeks with our member businesses and other key stakeholders in the area to ascertain their views and their preferences which we have outlined in the paper below.

Creating a Walkable City

The Chamber supports pedestrian-first policies, but also recognises the challenges with modal change. Until Dublin's public transport capacity and service levels are significantly improved there will continue to be a reliance upon and need to facilitate the car in the city centre. The Chamber welcomes the plans outlined by Dublin City Council in both Options 3 and 4 of the consultation as an application of pedestrian-first policy and a significant investment in public realm in this central hub of the city. The proposals focus on the need to reduce the levels of traffic congestion in the area while maintaining access. The plans outlined strive to balance the demands from the public for increased pedestrianisation with the needs of businesses to maintain access for deliveries.

The Chamber also welcomes the inclusion of a segregated 2-way cycle lane under both proposed options and encourages the Council to continue to invest in active travel infrastructure, and to further encourage modal shift to public transport, working with relevant stakeholders to progress key projects such as BusConnects, the DART and Luas expansion plans, Metrolink and the roll-out of the Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan.

In Dublin Chamber's recent *Dublin: The 15-Minute City* report we outlined how a 15 Minute City vision could work in Dublin. Our document highlights the role that active travel plays in achieving this vision: every journey starts first with a walk, whether that is the full journey or a short walk to access a bike, car, or public transport. Having a high-quality public realm and facilities that promote active travel will be necessary to effect modal change on a large scale. The combination of pedestrian-first policies and green infrastructure has been very successful in Barcelona's superblock redesign and has significantly enhanced the walkability of the city.¹ Pedestrian-first policy focuses on improving the walkability of a city and recognises the role that active transport plays in improving both public accessibility and the health of citizens. Safe walkways, crossroads, shade and shelter, permeability, and access are all key features of a walkable space.² By investing in the public realm, focusing on access for all, lighting and safety, and maintaining safe distances between cars and pedestrians, Dublin can create communities that are walkable and support the vision of a 15 Minute City. Creating connected and walkable places in which people can live, work, and play also encourages social interaction, thereby building stronger communities. Flagship projects in the city centre can play a key role in encouraging modal shift.

Finally, research including Dublin Chamber's award-winning Global Reputation Project and Vision for Dublin 2050 demonstrates how important safety is in maintaining and enhancing Dublin's reputation. The Global Reputation Report found that fewer than a third of respondents would describe Dublin as a safe city, while one in seven believe it is not safe.³ This should be considered as a factor in all future public realm improvements to ensure that the city's streets look and feel safe for all. Improvements to the public realm can play a significant role in how safe people perceive an area to be: open and pedestrian-focused spaces with excellent street lighting enhance the city's overall look and feel, as well as its safety. Specific investment and co-ordination in terms of greater street policing and CCTV should also be examined.

Collaboration with businesses

Collaboration with businesses is vital to ensuring the success of many improvements to the public realm. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a renewed focus on the need for collaboration between businesses and the Local Authorities across the city. The ability and desire to work together to come up with innovative solutions to enable businesses to trade will be increasingly important. The swiftness with which Local Authorities have responded to the need for changes to the public realm to facilitate walking and cycling in the context of social distancing has been very welcome and is eye-opening to the possibilities post Covid-19.

Trial runs and pilot programmes are an excellent and engaging way of establishing the positive potential of a new policy initiative, as well as its potential problems. The Chamber had previously called for pedestrian trials to be carried out in 2018 and strongly welcomed Dublin City Council's trial pedestrianisation of College Green in the summer of 2019, which largely met with positive results.⁴ The trialling of the concept helped both citizens and businesses to

¹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-07/inside-a-barcelona-superblock-pedestrians-rule>

² <https://www.itdp.org/2018/02/07/pedestrians-first-walkability-tool/>

³ Dublin Chamber, *Dublin's Global Reputation Report*,

<https://www.dublinchamber.ie/getattachment/Business-Agenda/Dublin-s-Global-Reputation/Dublin-s-Global-Reputation-Report.pdf?lang=en-IE>

⁴ <https://www.dublinchamber.ie/media/news/december-2018/chamber-calls-for-trial-of-college-green-plaza>

get a sense of the benefits and potential challenges that a plaza on College Green would bring. In future pedestrianisation projects and public realm improvements, pilot programmes and trials should continue to be embraced as a way to learn what works and what does not, allowing for flexibility and creativity in relation to all sectors involved, particularly in dynamic and vibrant parts of the city. The current proposals reflect the general public's desire for increased pedestrianisation, but also address the learnings from the trial runs, the concerns of businesses, and the need to maintain access for deliveries.

Coordination with public transport

In November 2018 An Bord Pleanála refused planning permission for the initial Dublin City Council proposal for the development of a civic plaza at College Green. This was largely due to concerns relating to traffic management analysis and the impact on the bus network. The Chamber welcomed the five trial pedestrianisations and the subsequent learnings. It also welcomes the inclusion of a Multi Criteria Appraisal by an independent transportation consultant. This independent analysis will strengthen the overall project and we hope to see this level of detail in all aspects of the project as they come online for public consultation.

The Chamber has been a strong advocate for the merits of the BusConnects project and acknowledges that it is largely due to the bus network re-design that the pedestrianisation and public realm enhancements to Dame Street and College Green are now possible. The current proposal outlined in Option 3 and 4 recommends re-routing the only main bus route through College Green, Spine A. The Chamber strongly encourages active and early consultation between Dublin City Council and the NTA and Dublin Bus regarding this proposal. The Chamber recognises the critical importance of bus transport to the city and the significant work involved in bringing the BusConnects project to its current stage. Any proposal put forward by DCC must support the bus network redesign under BusConnects.

Preferred Option

Having broadly consulted with businesses based in the area, and key other stakeholders, a clear preference for Option 3 has emerged. Broadly speaking, businesses were in favour of the planned public realm improvements as outlined but considered that Option 4 is too restrictive and has the potential to negatively impact on their ability to do business by curtailing delivery times. Unlike other pedestrianised streets in the city such as Grafton Street or Henry Street, College Green is not a core retail area, but it is diverse in the range of businesses operating there and this is reflected in the broader need for the greater access that is offered under Option 3.

Our members believe Option 3 addresses the need of businesses in the area, while also facilitating the growing public demand for increased pedestrianisation and enhanced public realm. It strikes the right balance between amenity and access for business in what is a core part of the city. With other streets in the area also under consideration for increased pedestrianisation, particularly in the Grafton Street area, Dame Street is a vital access point for businesses in the locality.

Recommendations

The proposals represent a welcome step in greater pedestrianisation, and the use of the trial runs has been helpful in establishing how they would work in practice. Pedestrianisation

projects must continue to be integrated with the needs and concerns of business that are directly impacted in these areas.

Dublin Chamber recommends:

- Adoption of Option 3, allowing 24-hour vehicular deliveries and access to Dame Street between South Great George's Street and Anglesea Street.
- Continued engagement with businesses in the area, particularly those located on the impacted streets, to understand their needs and to work through any specific issues that arise.
- Recognition of the role that the public realm plays in ensuring safe open spaces and ensuring that services, such as street policing and CCTV are considered and coordinated to improve safety in the city.
- The continued use of pilot programmes and trials in other parts of the city to establish learnings, based on the success of the programme in both the College Green area and the Grafton Street Area.