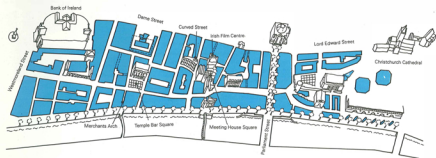


DUBLIN RENAISSANCE



Urban renewal, Temple Bar, Dublin
Architects
Group 91
Criticism
Catherine Slessor

In common with many other European cities, the centre of Dublin shows the effects of years of chronic neglect and depopulation. Unlike the ambitious superstar master plans for Berlin and Genoa, the proposed rejuvenation of the Dublin's Temple Bar area by a consortium of local architects is a much more low-key affair – yet its combination of responsive public space and mixed uses is an instructive paradigm for those involved in urban repair.



Temple Bar in the context of central Dublin

Gauged into the crumbling epicentre of Dublin, Temple Bar's location has been both a bane and a boon. The 30-acre district is bounded on the northern edge by the Liffey Quays and to the south by Dame Street in the city's financial area. The network of narrow streets extends from Trinity College and the eighteenth-century Parliament complex in the east, to City Hall and Christ Church Cathedral in the west. The western third of Temple Bar incorporates part of the medieval city; the remainder of the area, originally subject to flooding, was not established until the seventeenth century.

Despite its prominence, smack in the guts of Dublin, Temple Bar lay dormant for over 20 years – following a decision at the end of the 1960s to redevelop the area as part of an ambitious new transport strategy for the city. The run-down enclave was seen as an unresisting focus for a new interchange between a proposed underground railway running from east to west along the banks of the Liffey and a new bus station. From 1976, the CIE – the national transport organisation – started assembling properties in Temple Bar on short-leases, with an ultimate view to demolishing them. This nurtured an eclectic and vibrant mixture of small-scale uses – cafés, art galleries, shops, clothing factories and recording studios – attracted by the cheap rents and bound together by a spirit of optimistic

bohemianism. In 1987, when plans for the transport interchange were scrapped – partly on economic grounds and partly in the wake of public concern – the way was cleared for the implementation of a more sympathetic, consensus approach to the redevelopment of the area.

Through the office of Charles Haughey, then Taoiseach, a development company was established and charged with overseeing this kinder gentler approach. Partial funding was obtained from the European Regional Development Fund. In October 1991, Temple Bar Properties organised a limited competition to find what it described as an 'Architectural Framework Plan for Temple Bar'. The brief aimed at the design of public space – streets and squares, their sequence and proportions – acknowledging it as a subject crucial to the identity and physical character of the city. The competition also provided an opportunity to establish a collective planning framework that could enable and encourage individual users and private enterprise to participate in the renovation of the area.

The winning competition entry, by Group 91, a consortium of eight Dublin practices, * took the existing street network as its initial point of departure. While acknowledging that this fragile matrix had developed over time, it was clear that it must develop further to cope with the

new pressures. Despite a chequered history, the original form of Temple Bar – its topography, street names and character – remains legible, but this apparent continuity occludes a lengthy series of radical interventions during succeeding centuries. These include the construction of the Ha'penny Bridge, a cast-iron footbridge across the Liffey, and the tinkering of the impossibly bureaucratic sounding Wide Streets Commissioners, which cut broad, ersatz boulevard swathes through the dense urban grain to create Parliament Street, Dame Street and Westmoreland Street. The minor streets of Temple Bar, originally little more than mean alleysways, have evolved over time; many have been cut through to the river.

The framework proposed by Group 91 seeks to continue this process of evolution. The direct east-west axial route – leading along Fleet Street and East Essex Street to Essex Gate and on to Christ Church at the western extremity – is identified as the backbone supporting Temple Bar, a main artery invigorating every part of the area. The creation of a new, meandering east-

west route, achieved by cutting through the derelict plots of a large city block, is intended to make the area more accessible to pedestrians. Three small new squares, carved out of derelict sites, provide readily identifiable points of orientation within the dense urban fabric. A further aim is to mesh Temple Bar back into the wider city by means of improved north-south links. These include the construction of a new pedestrian footbridge across the Liffey (the Poddle Bridge) and a proposal to divert most through traffic away from Parliament Street, which is subsequently reconfigured as a tree-lined boulevard facing City Hall.

Planning permission has recently been obtained for three main elements in the Framework Plan – Temple Bar Square, the Curved Street and Meeting House Square, as well as the associated buildings that define their edges. Construction work on these projects is planned to start during the first half of this year, with completion by the end of 1994. Realisation of the second phase of the plan – the largely residential area between Parliament Street and



Christ Church, is scheduled for completion in 1995. In the meantime, work has already begun on a broad range of private-sector and other associated infill developments throughout the area – among them the Irish Film Centre (p.48).

*Group 91 comprises the following practices: – Gray Clancy, Graham Architects, Paul Keogh, MacCarthy-Mullen, Molyneux Mc Eneaney, O'Donnell and Kearney, Shane O'Toole, Deane Ryan.

TEMPLE BAR SQUARE

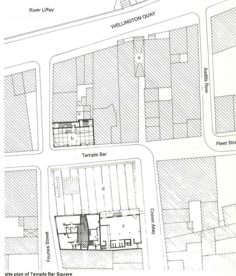
There is a certain inevitability in the location and character of Temple Bar Square, which marks the area's busiest pedestrian junction between the Ha'penny Bridge river crossing and the direct east-west spine route. The passive, dead space of an existing surface car park is transformed into a vibrant public square, intended as a forum for the area's colourful and plentiful street culture.

The realisation of this new square is planned to cause the least disruption to the existing fabric and involves the demolition of only one small building, strengthening the relationship

between two nineteenth-century red brick and stone buildings which will then face each other across the new square.

New interventions include the construction of a light metal screen facade to an existing industrial warehouse and the insertion of two mixed-use infill buildings on the north and south sides of the square, to complete and animate the space. Cafés and shops will occupy the ground level, with residential accommodation above. The re-paved stone surface of the square responds to the topography of the site by sloping and stepping down to Temple Bar itself, the street that used to mark the edge of the Liffey shoreline.

- 1. Ha'penny Bridge
- 2. Infill residential building
- 3. Infill warehouse/retail building
- 4. Temple Bar Square
- 5. Market stall building



1 Aerial view of central Dublin, bisected by the Liffey. The Temple Bar area lies on the south edge of the river (right of picture) demarcated by the rapid northward of the Central Bank.

2 Perspective looking south of Temple Bar Square, with the Central Bank building in the background.

3 Site plan of Temple Bar Square

