

Case study summary report – Cork

1.1 History and context

Cork is Ireland's second city and a key regional economic driver in the southern region. Cork city and suburbs had a population of 208,669 in 2016. Between 1996-2016, the rate of population growth in Cork was less than half the national average continuing a downward trajectory that had been in evidence for decades and which the local authorities have made various attempts to address.

In the 19th century, textiles, brewing and distilling all became major industries, the butter trade flourished and Cork harbour grew in importance as a trading point for trans-Atlantic trade. However during the early to mid-20th century, the port heavily industrialised with chemical, steel and pharmaceutical industries particularly in the lower harbour away from the city centre lands. The Cork Harbour Commissioners published the Cork Harbour Plan in 1972 to help ensure development in a coordinated manner but due to lack of funding, its potential was never realised.

In the early 1980s, the city was adversely impacted by de-industrialisation with the closure of factories, such as Ford in the south docks, resulting in disinvestment, rising unemployment, the emergence of large brownfield sites, and a declining city centre. Cork Docklands comprises 162 ha of land located east of the city centre. This area is divided into the South Docks, North Docks and Tivoli Docks.

Cork is one of three Tier1 ports in the Republic of Ireland, maintaining a presence close to the city centre but with large deepwater facilities operating and currently being redeveloped at Ringaskiddy (approx. 14km downstream). Since the 1970s, the port of Cork has been increasingly moving to Ringaskiddy which provides space for expansion, deep-water berthing and other development opportunities. The Port of Cork company was established as a new statutory authority under the Harbours Act 1996, and is responsible for the management, control, operation and development of the port.

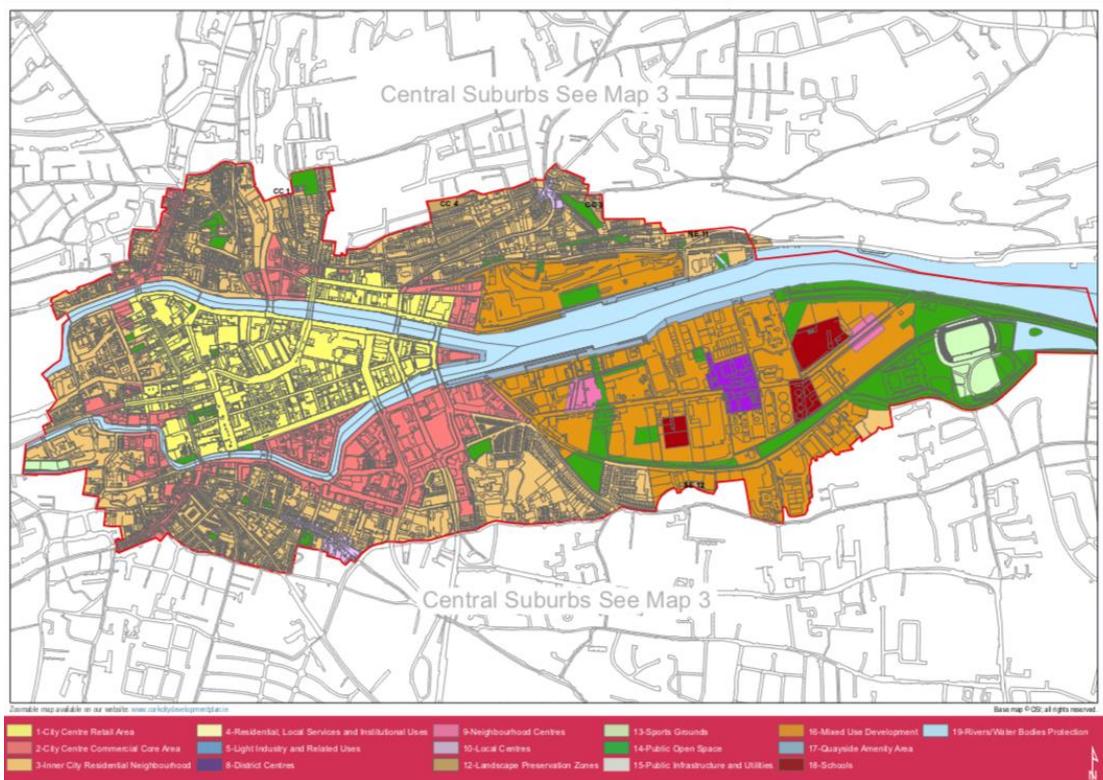
1.2 Visions, goals and plans

While the city council began to explore small-scale interventions to revitalise the economy of the city in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was not until the publication of *Cork Docklands Development Strategy* in 2002 that a coordinated large-scale approach to regeneration began to be discussed. The strategy aimed to refocus attention on the urban waterfront, bring abandoned sites back into productive re-use and knit the former port lands back into the fabric of the city.

The redevelopment of Cork Docklands has been recognised as a national priority project in a number of central government plans over two decades including the National Spatial Strategy 2002- 2020 (NSS), the National Development Plan 2007-2013 (NDP), and the Irish Government's submission on the EU Regional Aid Map for Ireland 2007-2013. A significant proportion of land is in some form of public ownership which provides a development opportunity. The 'brownfield' character of the area reflects former industrial uses but as Map 1 illustrates, the Cork City Development Plan has zoned the

majority of the area for mixed use development (orange), new schools (red), a new district centre (purple) and amenity (green/blue). The north and south docks areas are east of the Custom House, located at the point where the bifurcated River Lee rejoins into one river channel.

Map 1: Zoning in the Cork City Development Plan from 2015



Source: Cork City Development Plan 2015-2021, Volume 2

The initial context for redevelopment was innovative attempts at wider city-regional planning in Cork, and the Cork Area Strategic Plan (CASP) 2001-2020 was the first attempt at metropolitan scale planning in Ireland. The plan was formally adopted by both Cork County and City Councils and embedded in their Development Plans in 2003 and 2004. The Cork docklands were identified as a key area for development, and the project was to unfold over a twenty-year timeframe with a focus towards the western end of docklands in the transition zone between the edge of the city centre and the former port lands.

The Cork Docklands Development Strategy 2002 with a detailed planning and design framework for the regenerated docklands was prepared and initially intended as “a capacity assessment” of what kinds of development could be accommodated in the docklands landbank. It included proposals for landuse patterns, public transport provision, desired mix of uses, and key design features. In addition, it presented an analysis of key infrastructural barriers, including Seveso sites, the need for new bridges and new transport links. Furthermore, the Strategy presented a vision for a new urban identity for a post-industrial Cork, which built on the plans to develop a metropolitan region and knowledge economy

outlined in CASP. It was further consolidated through branding exercises surrounding the preparations for Cork's year as European Capital of Culture in 2005 (O'Callaghan and Linehan, 2007). The planning vision and policy approach outlined in the Cork Docklands Development Strategy was formalised through two separate statutory local area plans for the North and South docks produced in 2005 and 2008.

The North Docks Local Area Plan covered a much smaller area than that of the South Docks Local Area Plan. The North Docks LAP was produced by the Docklands Directorate, while the more substantial SDLAP was trusted to the Docklands Directorate. Focusing on a small number of sites centred on the CIE lands adjacent to Kent Station on Horgans Quay and on Water Street, the LAP gave detailed prescriptions on mixed-use development, including for example on public realm features and height guidelines. The South Docks Local Area Plan gave detail to the vision of the Cork Docklands Development Strategy 2002. The plan was undertaken by the Docklands Directorate with private consultants, and with inputs from Cork City Council planning department. It proposed the regeneration of the area into a mixed-use development.

The LAP was framed as an attempt to provide a structure through which regeneration of this challenging district might commence. A series of challenges were identified in the plan but the opportunity that this area provided as a test-bed for new, more sustainable urban development approaches was also acknowledged. The key delivery mechanism in the plan was private sector investment that would deliver the vision within a twenty-year timeframe.

In the last year, the wider planning context for Cork Docklands has changed and the development plan will be subject to a full review in late 2019. The National Planning Framework launched by central government in February 2018 requires the complete realignment of the planning system in Ireland and has been identified by a number of our interviewees as absolutely critical in refocusing attention on the potential of Cork as a city, and Cork docklands as an opportunity space.

The framework will be operationalized through new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES's) to be developed at the regional level, accompanied by Metropolitan Area Spatial Plans (MASP's) for the five city-regions in Ireland. These MASP's are due for completion in summer 2019 and once that has taken place a review of all planning policies at the urban and local level will be undertaken to ensure alignment. It is likely that Cork docklands will feature heavily in the MASP for the Cork metropolitan area.

1.3 Laws and regulations

A series of documents have played a role in how Cork Docklands has been conceptualised both as a planning space but also in terms of its role within the city. These documents have all now either lapsed or are under revision but include.

Cork Area Strategic Plan (CASP) 2001-2020 and CASP Update (2008)

The CASP was the first attempt at metropolitan scale planning in Ireland. The strategies in CASP 2001 – 2020, were formally adopted by both Cork County and City Councils and embedded in their Development Plans in 2003 and 2004. The Cork docklands were identified as one of the key areas for development

Cork Docklands Development Strategy 2002

The Cork Docklands Development Strategy was commissioned and produced by internationally based urban design consultants, Urban Initiatives. A broad framework was set out focusing on both the north and south docks, in particular on the potential of the south docklands landbank. The Strategy was initially intended as “a capacity assessment” of what kinds of development could be accommodated in the docklands.

North and South Docks Local Area Plans (NDLAP/SDLAP)

The North Docks Local Area Plan was produced by the Planning Directorate and focused on a small number of sites centred on the CIE lands adjacent to Kent Station on Horgans Quay and on Water Street. THE SDLAP focused on attracting private sector investment that would deliver the docklands vision in a very challenging environment, including a SEVESO site.

Cork City Development Plan 2015-2021

The Cork City Development Plan 2015-2021 is the main strategic planning policy document that guides the future development of the city as a whole. Chapter 13 focuses on the City Centre and Docklands.

As well as the formal plans, there is a formal role for public participation in the Irish planning system and a statutory obligation to provide time within the process for responses to proposed developments. In the case of Cork docklands the local area plan for the south docks had significant consultation that was facilitated through strong structures including the public participation network (PPN) and local community development committee (LCDC).

Within the area, general environmental directives related to, for example, SEVESO sites and water quality are particularly significant as are regulations on building height, density and permitted location in an environment prone to flooding.

1.4 Stakeholders involved

Cork City Council is the primary actor with responsibility for the docklands redevelopment and established the Docklands Directorate in 2001 to progress the regeneration of the area and to support the development of detailed local plans for the north and south docks. The directorate no longer exists and the responsibility for docklands now resides within Cork City Council Planning and Economic Development department.

The key institutions and agencies of significance in the regeneration of Cork Docklands, identified through our interviews, are:

- Port of Cork as the owner of waterfront sides and a key operational user of waterfront lands.
- Cork City Council as the planning and economic development authority
- Southern Regional Assembly who are responsible for the Metropolitan Area Spatial Planning process, within which Cork Docklands is anticipated to be a strategic project
- State infrastructure providers: Transport Infrastructure Ireland, Irish Rail, Irish Water, National Transport Authority who are responsible for key infrastructure but also own land in the area
- Central government and agencies: Dept of Planning, Housing and Local Government; Land Development Agency who will bring critical skills, funding and financial expertise to the regeneration process
- Business interests: Chamber of Commerce, Cork Business Association, Origin
- Private developers and investors who are key to unlocking the development potential of the waterfront sites
- Local residents and citizen groups who live in the area or will be impact
- Local landowners who will need to buy into the overall vision of the area but who also could potentially act as a barrier to regeneration.

1.5 From vision to realization

After the publication of the Docklands Development strategy in 2002, Cork city council established a docklands directorate to drive the vision to realisation. Local area plans for the north docks and south docks were published and they identified significant barriers to redevelopment, particularly in the south docks. Together with the wider Celtic Tiger property boom, the Cork Docklands Development Strategy (2002) was intended to become a stimulus for attracting new development actors and more ambitious projects to Cork. Over many years Cork has existed in the shadow of Dublin and has struggled to assert itself in terms of attracting large-scale developers and development, despite having a well-developed pharmaceutical industry. The aim of the Docklands Directorate was to give Cork docklands a visibility that would enable it bid for funding and attention from both the public and private sector.

Once a vision was established, and given effect by the local area plans, a number of large-scale planning applications were made by a variety of developers. However, because of planning timelines and the calamitous crisis that engulfed Ireland in 2008/09, development stalled. Although the economic crisis affected many European countries, the context for Cork was unique as Ireland faced not just an economic but also a fiscal and property crisis. Because the development was so reliant on the interest and capacity of the private sector, it was particularly vulnerable to external shocks. Bankrupt developers, systemic failure of the banking system, and lack of any state capacity once the IMF bailout happened meant that all planned development ground to a complete halt. Even without the contextual crisis, the south docks local area plan was doomed to failure as many property developers deemed it economically unviable as it was overly ambitious and required significant development levies to be paid.

There has thus been a significant hiatus in planning and development of Cork docklands with momentum only recently re-emerging.

1.6 Overall results and outcomes

The CASP was an admirable attempt to engage in metropolitan strategic planning but while some progress was evident, it had not been at the scale or speed initially expected. Similarly the National Spatial Strategy that could have been a national-scale driver for the visions and the goals of the Cork Docklands Development Strategy suffered from a failure of implementation. A combination of poor timing in the development cycle, external shocks, overly-ambitious plans and no strategic delivery mechanism meant that the vision outlined was not achieved.

Although there is not yet a new plan for Cork docklands, development has begun within the broader area. Developers see the potential of this urban quarter and have begun to invest on a site-by-site basis without any formal masterplan in place. Some developers have talked about their belief in the wider docklands project and desire to be involved at an early stage, others have simply viewed certain developments as just another inner city location and do not consider their activities in the framework of any broader plan or structure.

1.7 Social and identity impacts

The regeneration of docklands has been relatively slow, and the amount of identified social, environmental or identity impacts is therefore very limited. However, the urban environment is undergoing change in response to more recent specific plans such as the Marina Park masterplan. This aims to connect the city to the old port lands in the south docks and harness the amenity potential of the waterfront zone. Construction is underway on the 22ha Marina park recreational site and it is expected to be a valuable amenity for the people living in the area.

The lack of tangible impact to date does not mean that there is no potential. Our interviewees have identified specific potential impacts of a renewed regeneration focus in docklands:

- It will re-shape Cork city-region, double the size of the city and open up facilities and employment opportunities that the city at present cannot accommodate.
- Public transport connections have the capacity, with appropriate planning and delivery, to create large-scale employment in high-quality, high-tech industries with ancillary services.
- The potential spin-off from docklands into the city centre is becoming evident through projects such as 1 Albert Quay.
- The full relocation of port operations to Ringaskiddy opens up large brownfield sites with a capacity in Tivoli particularly to deliver large-scale residential development.
- Because of the scale of available land, there is potential to develop large-scale facilities as for example a technology campus that could act in synergy with the planned expansion of UCC

Business School nearby and deliver the objectives of the city development plan. A large-scale development could act as a major catalyst for further development of the wider area.

- There is a large potential for preservation of port heritage. This would create a high quality urban environment, preserve identity and incorporating heritage elements makes economic sense.
- There are good opportunities for Cork docklands to become a key driver of the regional economy and to refocus the identity of the city in its broader hinterland as well as nationally. The Cork city-region will be viewed more widely as an attractive alternative to the Dublin City-region and will enable the city to achieve a critical mass in terms of particular economic sectors and population.

1.8 Main Barriers and drivers

The initial plan for Cork Docklands in 2002 was driven by the experience of other similar urban areas internationally and in Ireland, with the success of the Dublin Docklands regeneration being one example of what could be achieved. It was also recognised that the Cork docklands are a unique opportunity in the city from a development perspective. Cork is a naturally hilly city which makes development very challenging, particularly any large-scale construction. The flat topography of the docklands was recognised as a rare development opportunity, as was the need to visually enhance these central sites close to key gateways into the city (main national routeway and rail station). Although significant preparation and planning had been put in place, scale, time and timing worked against the realisation of the plans. In the early years, there was some private investment, but the economic crisis of 2008/09 brought this to an abrupt halt.

Since the upturn in 2013, some private developers have been encouraged back into the docklands but a key problem now is how to manage this enormous development site so that private investment in the absence of a plan, does not occur in an ad hoc manner confined to the most favourable locations, close to the city centre. Providing the necessary infrastructure and funding to unlock the full potential of the area is a major challenge.

Strategic spatial planning has been important in the Irish context since the early 2000s, but the implementation of the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) in 2001 was diluted by political compromises and by not being adequately linked to the provision of strategic infrastructure. This led to overdevelopment in some regions while development objectives were stymied by the lack of delivery of key infrastructure in others. There is a major opportunity with the new National Planning Framework linked to the National Development Plan to bring a step change.

The unpredictability of the provision of infrastructure has constituted a barrier for regeneration for nearly two decades. Given the vulnerability of the Cork docklands to tidal flooding, a reliable and convincing flood levels strategy is critical in encouraging development in the south docks as previous proposals were considered unworkable by those involved.

As noted in previous reports (Wrixon, 2008), Cork has many conditions favourable to port regeneration, but it is also characterised by a number of key challenges to be resolved before the wider docklands can be regenerated:

- The regeneration of the docklands requires the full relocation of the Port of Cork from the city quays. While provisional agreement for this relocation have long been in place, negotiations are ongoing and at present are fraught due to lack of agreement on land values as land is transferred from the port to the city council.
- Several large landowners in docklands are semi-state and industrial companies. Activating these sites for redevelopment may require the sale and strategic management of this land.
- The relocation of industrial activity will also require decontamination of Seveso sites that are blocking particular development opportunities.
- The regeneration of the docklands is dependent on the provision of strategic infrastructure, including new bridge(s), road networks, and expansion of public transport.
- The viability of new development in Cork is influenced by both the ability of property developers to attract foreign and domestic direct investment and by the price of land/development costs relating to property market cycles.

A key issue has been the role and challenge of land ownership within the docklands with some land in public ownership, others under the control of large landowners, many small landowners, and some leaseholders. Another issue of relevance for the regeneration concerns the numerous public agencies from various scales of government that are involved with the project and their accountability and relationships with other state stakeholders.

A particular challenge over time appears to have been achieving a balance between broader territorial development and the health of the core city as the engine for city-regional growth. The CASP Update (2008) noted the influence of actors and policies beyond the region, particularly central government departments, state agencies such as the IDA, the National Spatial Strategy, and Regional Planning Guidelines in shaping the viability of docklands project, particularly in relation to infrastructural funding and overarching policy frameworks and objectives. This governance challenge remains to be resolved.

Accommodation and housing provision has also been a significant challenge as developers are struggling to provide housing in a viable manner in city centre locations, due to the costs of development, taxes associated with residential development in Ireland, and very high regulatory requirements. Coupled with the need to develop better public transport infrastructure, these could be significant deterrents to attracting new residents. The inflexibility of the development plan has also been identified as a barrier as it limits the possibility of the authorities to respond to changing market conditions.

1.9 Status of case study

This report is based on a preliminary analysis of the interviews undertaken with relevant stakeholders in Cork. Given time limitations it has not been possible to complete the range of interviews that we intend to conduct nor to undertake a full and systematic thematic analysis of the data.

During the remainder of April and all of May, the remaining interviews will be completed, and a thematic analysis of the entire data set will be undertaken. A draft final report of the Cork case study will be available for review by Cork City Council by mid-June 2019.