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Re: Consultation Submission on the Future of Temple Bar

This consultation is well timed.

It now coincides with the wind up of the discredited Temple Bar Cultural Trust as highlighted in the Irish Independent headline 4th March 2014 *'Scandal-Hit Temple Bar Trust is Axed'.*

In April 2014 the Huffington Post's inclusion of Dublin's Temple Bar as one of the *'10 most disappointing'* places in the world for tourists, should be considered a source of national embarrassment.

This comes ten years after the 2004 Guardian report which exposed Temple bar as *'Ibiza on the Liffey'* with the byline *'Badly behaved binge drinkers led locals to desert Temple Bar'.*

Here was an area on which major EU and Irish taxpayer money was spent and tax-relief subsidy granted in developing what was to be a flagship in urban regeneration and cultural quarter.

The development brief for the area was sent out in the completion winning scheme by Group 91 Architects which formed the basis of the Temple Bar Framework Plan 1992.

This combined an integrated vision for:

- conservation of the existing buildings
- new buildings of high contemporary design quality
- a high quality public realm with new public spaces
- cultural centres to form the focal points of the area
- a mix of businesses and arts activities in the area
- a vibrant residential population creating an inner city community

This vision has been bitterly betrayed.

The presence of cultural venues in the area has become emasculated.

There is a systemic lack of control of uses, alterations to buildings, noise, design control and signage, with the unwelcome increase in international chain franchises.

There is a serious lack of street management particularly in the evenings and at night. Intrusive and inappropriate amplified busking is uncontrolled and the streets around Temple Bar Square have become an open-air pub.

Temple Bar Square which should be the public realm focal point of the area is now a visual shambles.

The western side of Westmoreland Street and Crown Alley is immersed in a sea of tackiness.

There is excessive encroachment of public space for pubs and restaurants.

Fast-food outlets are increasingly demeaning the character of the area.

The main streets are dominated by pubs and noisy music venues, many in a kitsch "Oirish" style like the Quays pub on Temple Bar Square, the Oliver St John Gogarty on Fleet Street and the much photographed Temple Bar pub on the Temple Lane Corner.

The treatment of the Merchants' Arch, one of the landmark historic buildings of the area, is a travesty. The mid 20th century former Bas Ass Café building which was intelligently refurbished to reflect its industrial modernist aesthetic has been refitted out as a parody of a Victorian pub. The historic use of the original Bewley's café on Fleet Street, with its late 19th C interior with original marble-topped tables, has been lost.

There has been poor management and maintenance of the original and restored areas of historic street paving.

Apart from a collapse in planning and design control, the area has become noise infested with uncontrolled amplified music. Loud speakers are placed over entrance doors across the area to blare into the surroundings, and noisy buskers or entire bands inflicting their all-too-often poor talent, are becoming an increasing nuisance.

The amenity of the area for its 2000 residents is being increasingly threatened by lack of planning and noise control. This undermines the objectives of the 1992 Framework Plan and the tax-relief supported residential development.

Much of the blame can be extended back to the early 1990s when Temple Bar Properties took a lead role and in developing or extending pubs.

The Temple Bar Cultural Trust is now being axed in a sea of scandal as reported by the Irish Independent on 4th March 2014:

> "*The scandal-hit trust was last year forced to alert Gardai of suspected financial irregularities. Senior managers at Dublin City Council suspect that unlawful loans were paid to staff without the knowledge of the board.*

The loans are understood to have been granted in the form of 'salary top-ups', sometimes worth thousands of euro.

It is also believed that there was serious abuse of company credit cards and personal expenses were charged to the company.

In the summer of 2012, details emerged of an external audit report which found that the trust was making late payments on its VAT returns and even allowed a non-management employee to have access to its bank accounts.

The body was also found to be slow in collecting hundreds of thousands of euro owed to it."

The leadership needed in guiding the original vision for the area was not provided by Temple Bar Properties, the Temple Bar Cultural Trust or Dublin City Council.

Much of the responsibility rests with Dublin City Council.

There has been a large-scale lack of enforcement of unauthorized development and breaches of planning permission. Over a number of years An Taisce has made enforcement complaints to the Council which generally remain unresolved. This creates a culture of accelerating non-compliance which is all too visible.

Attached is an illustrated appendix outlining selected examples of planning enforcement failure, which now has such an adverse cumulative impact, and the general deteriorating quality of Temple Bar.

Parallel to this is the large-scale lack of enforcement of environment noise control and mounting frustration by residents which needs to be addressed.

The time has now come for new leadership and new vision from the newly-elected Dublin City Council and recently appointed City Manager.

A review is required on the original objectives which guided the 1992 Framework Plan and major public investment and tax relief subsidy for the area.

The area needs a renewal of its core status as a cultural quarter and a location for cultural activity.

The residential community and indigenous small businesses need protection.

The City Council needs to appoint a task force to apply its regulatory functions to planning and noise enforcement control.

The challenge is now for the Council to take the civic leadership is making Temple Bar an historic city quarter of which Ireland can be proud.

Appendix 1

Illustrated examples



FAILURE OF PLANNING ENFORCEMENT IN TEMPLE BAR

The Temple Bar pub, 45-48 Temple Bar (a Protected Structure), effectively a superpub sprawling through numerous buildings at the corner of Temple Bar and Temple Lane. Last November, Village magazine described the frontage of this 'traditional pub' as *"a confectionary of gratuitous, under-detailed mediocrity".*

In 2013, An Taisce found that a neon sign projecting at high level, heritage-style lamps and further projecting signs above the fascia had been all added to the Protected Structure without planning permission. Dublin City Council Planning Enforcement section failed to secure removal of any of these items (File Ref. E0647/13) despite the supplying of photographic evidence (inset, above) prior to the changes.

The recent additions are on top of an already severely cluttered exterior, with a multitude of uplighters, downlighters and flower baskets attached to the historic brick elevation. Hanging-strip lights erected across the facades at Christmas some years ago are being left up all-year-round.

The unauthorised neon sign recently erected at high level is entirely unnecessary for the purposes of identification as the premises already has a prominent location jutting out in the medieval streetline right in the centre of Temple Bar.

Addition of more and more signage, lighting and other clutter to the building is only serving to obscure its architectural character as a late-Georgian pub/shop premises, which should be its main attraction.

At the time of a recent planning application to increase yet again the size of the pub to provide an 'oyster bar' (permitted - Ref. 2972/13), a suggestion made to the City Council planning department to invite the applicant to submit a plan for the de-cluttering and restoration of character of the exterior was not taken.



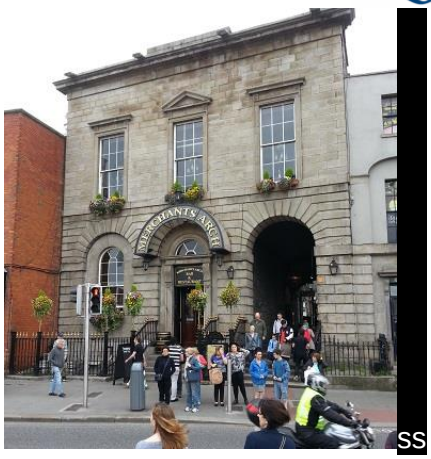


FAILURE OF PLANNING ENFORCEMENT (cont.)

In 2011 yellow shop signage lettering was erected by Centra, 13 Temple Bar in breach of the aluminium finish agreed under planning application 3603/10 at both the Temple Bar Square (above left) and Wellington Quay facades of the shop. Again the City Council's Planning Enforcement section has had no effect in securing compliance with the permitted plans (Enforcement File Ref. E0183/11).

In parts of Paris, yellow is not permitted as it is considered cheap (above right).









TIDE OF FAKE HERITAGE

The basis of the 1990s regeneration of Temple Bar is being gravely undermined by a tide of fake heritage, in particular relating to the public house trade. The renewal of the area was based on consolidation of the existing character, with honest repair of the historic building stock and infilling in a distinct modern style. Examples of the current trend since 2010:

- Former Rock Garden (top left): This successful early '90s conversion of a brick warehouse on Crown Alley as one of the first purpose-built rock music venues in the city was made over as an 'Irish heritage' pub & food experience unimaginatively named the Storehouse

- Merchants' Hall (top right): The new public house permitted here (despite there being a strong basis for a cultural use of this landmark historic building) was fitted out in reproduction Victorian style with degrading additions to the exterior (above left)

- Bad Ass Café (above right): This Dublin institution with its distinctive mid-20th century factory interior to the restaurant - part of the rich fabric of Temple Bar - was removed and a fake Victorian pub installed without planning permission. An approved 2013 application to address the unauthorised works to the Protected Structure has not yet been implemented (Ref. 2886/13)

TIDE OF FAKE HERITAGE (cont.)





In 2009, and again in 2010, the former Hungry Harry's, 26-27 East Essex Street (top) was refused planning permission by the City Council and An Bord Pleanala for continuation of a fast-food takeaway use (Planning Refs. 1551/08 & PL29S.231116, and 3508/09 & PL29S.235003) for reasons including adverse impact on residents of apartments above.

Not only did the fast-food restaurant not cease or return to the previous level of operation following these refusals, but in 2013 brazenly rebranded under the Supermac's chain (above) - antithesis of the Temple Bar cultural quarter.

The existing modern stone shopfront with steel-framed windows and doors (top), part of the award-winning Printworks building designed by Derek Tynan Architects as part of the 1990s regeneration

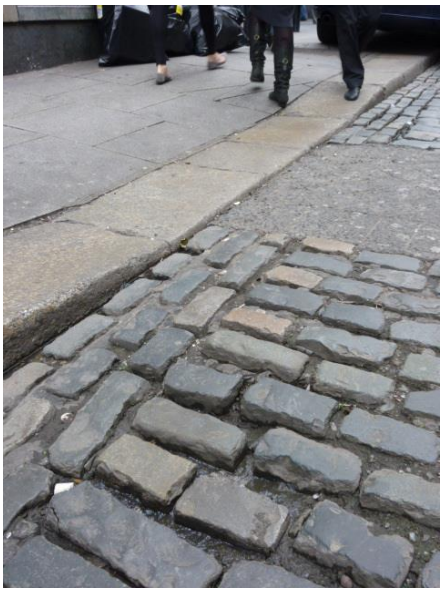
project for Temple Bar, was replaced without planning permission by a fake traditional shopfront in corporate colours and with plastic fascia lettering.

The Printworks premises, 26-27 Essex Street is a modern building, intended to be distinct from the historic fabric of the area. The 'traditional style' shopfront erected is inappropriate and must be removed and the original shopfront design reinstated. The unauthorised use must be resolved.





The Quays (left) and Oliver St. John Gogarty pubs – characterising the kitsch, over-presented style of pubs dominating the area.





POOR QUALITY & LACK OF CONTROL IN PUBLIC REALM

Degraded historic sett surface, Temple Bar (above left), and the quality of street surface Temple Bar should be aiming for, Grand Place, Brussels (above right). Shockingly, no conservation expertise is engaged for repair or alterations to historic surfaces in the Temple Bar Conservation Area, and work is planned and undertaken by the City Council's Roads & Traffic engineers. An Taisce wrote to the City Council during one such example in 2010 (correspondence - http://www.billtormey.ie/2010/07/10/an-taisce-and-cobble-stones-at-temple-bar/).



POOR QUALITY & LACK OF CONTROL IN PUBLIC REALM (cont.)

Sloppy parking signage allowed to remain in the public realm for years on end in the centre of Temple Bar. Dublin City Council Traffic Inspector Frank Crowley was asked in writing back in 2010 to address the appearance of the sign on Fownes Street Upper (a Conservation Area), which remains in situ in 2014. This location has also attracted sandwich-board clutter.