

Lauren Griffin

From: Lauren Griffin
Sent: Wednesday 6 November 2024 14:48
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: ABP Re No 320938 - Woodquay Park, Galway

A Chara,

The Board acknowledges receipt of your email, official correspondence will issue in due course.

Kind regards,

Lauren

From: Derrick Hambleton [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday 6 November 2024 09:16
To: Bord <bord@pleanala.ie>
Subject: ABP Re No 320938 - Woodquay Park, Galway

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An Taisce

*The National Trust for Ireland
Galway Association – Planning Committee*

An Bord Pleanála
64 Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
DO1 V902

6th November, 2024.

Re: ABP Ref No - 320938 -24. Part 10 Planning application. Section 177AE of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended – Planning Application to An Bord Pleanála for enhancement measures to existing Woodquay Park to include; highways improvements, parking, new paths and paving, seating, lighting, public art, sustainable urban drainage, tree removals and new biodiverse planting by Galway City Council.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Having attended the open day held at the Galway Rowing Club HQ, as well as other residents meetings, An Taisce members have a number of comments to make in this submission regarding the proposed upgrade of 'Woodquay Park'. An Taisce expect their comments to be taken into account when decisions are being made by ABP, either to modify, make additions to, or indeed refuse the application being made by Galway City Council.

It is An Taisce's view that the present park would remain a local community park, for the principal benefit of local residents, for the enjoyment of many other city residents, as well as Galway's many visitors as an 'Enclosed Garden Park'!

One of the issues that drew most comment was of course the question, is 'Woodquay Park' to remain an enclosed park with protective fencing and to have lockable gates, or is this to become an open Plaza with no fencing or gates providing no protection from a future that would inevitably allow occasional unsociable activity, probably during hours of darkness, which would present a problem for some older, and most other people living in areas adjacent to Woodquay, Corrib Terrace, Riverside and Waterside?

Like the nearby Children's Millennium Park in University Road, the only other locked park in Galway, while we perceive it to be obvious that most local residents would prefer this park to be lockable, their desire has been ignored in this application! This alone is good reason for ABP to make recommendations to retain fencing, or determine a refusal!

"Very often promoters of public infrastructure projects too easily forget that it is not what they say but the way that they do something that builds trust and legitimacy, reduces tensions in the affected communities and moves people and organisations to agree rather than dissent".

To quote the wise words of Michael Ocock RIP, the British chartered surveyor and project risk management expert with strong Irish connections, who died in February 2022 at the age of 81;

"Some promoters of infrastructure schemes are arrogant enough to think they know what's best for everyone".

"They're convinced they have sufficient power and more than enough influence to override objections to their plans - and they act accordingly".

Why? Because the public has only the one option to comment upon. Why only one option? Because alternative schemes for the proposed improvement have already been ruled out. Why have they been discarded? Because they are 'less effective in meeting the wider objectives [deliverability] of a road improvement scheme'?

How's that for obscuratation? [Ocock said] Only when expert judgement has already decided upon the 'right' option can the public, it seems, be allowed to express its view and then only on matters of detail. Do the parks users and others never have good ideas about other solutions to the problem or possess knowledge vital to the early design and development of a scheme? Apparently not".

Our members who attended various meetings over time and made their own observations, have spoken with many residents of Riverside, Corrib Terrace and Woodquay areas over many years, coming away with an understanding that the current designs are being presented with just too much by way of hard landscaping against the original and the present day green garden park area.

Their preference is to avoid the construction of an open 'Eyre Square' type of public park that is dominated by too much hard surface and which should continue to retain a surrounding appropriate height hedge and protective fencing!

As in many European cities, also in Dublin, small Victorian style local parks are fenced around, and are locked at night to try to avoid unsociable situations arising!

This project was initially presented as to become a 'Community led project' by the 'Woodquay Residents Association' in its first emanation, as was shown in 2017. After which Mary Reynolds was engaged and was paid by public subscription to produce a design according to local desire. Mary Reynolds has over time developed a solid reputation as a gold medal winning garden designer at Chelsea Flower Show. As a result of her success she was then asked to design a Peoples Garden at Kew.

However, this was not the first time that Galway Council executive attempted to roll over residents opinions. In 2003 proposals were previously made by city management to allow the demolition of the

historic Galway Rowing Club building, after granting permission to support the building of a new clubhouse further upriver, while also clearing the park!

See original planning application decision 03-855 and ABP's subsequent refusal under An Taisce's appeal No- 208069. The city management, more than twenty years ago had planned to take away the railings and open up Woodquay Park! Uisce Eireann have since completed a new water extraction facility at the no longer available, upriver site!

Cost Issues:

At a projected €1.2m, Galway City Council seem to be following a national trend towards promotion of projects which can often overrun in time, or in budget?

The URDF plans to take a bridge deck for the proposed Clifden Pedestrian and Cycle over the old piers of the former Galway – Clifden railway are at preferred design level, after public submission was invited earlier this year. This, which would open the desired Greenway from the city centre through Woodquay to the bridge, and onwards to Moycullen, is a much more expensive but desirable linked project. It might be a better project if the two schemes were merged, and built together, since either one will link with, and have beneficial impact on, the other?

With the City having its own Parks Department, Biodiversity Officer, Planners a Heritage Officer, Conservation Officer, Director of Planning and Architects, the Woodquay Park project might have been developed in-house with a single tender contractor employed at perhaps lesser expense?

It would appear that a sort of corporate takeover has taken place in Galway, with the outcome being that residents in the wider Woodquay area are being directed towards becoming part of a much larger and wider Tourist amenity, which includes roads improvements at the wider commercial open southern side of the R866 at Woodquay.

The adjacent southern side of the road is a quite separate business, residential and retail dominated area with surrounding streets part of a much larger open street market project that is separately proposed.

The main Headford Road R866 separates the two elements that are quite simply different and should be the subject of separate sets of plans.

Galways Festival Months:

For the month of July, Galway hosts a film festival, the International arts festival and the Galway races. These events will attract circa 300,000 people to the city over one month. The arts festival big top which is placed just across the river from Woodquay, hosts 5,000 people per night. Many residents of Woodquay also attend these events with the Galway Rowing Club also hosting various Festival Club nights.

As the Rowing Club is an integral part of the community, much effort is taken by the organisers to make sure that local residents are not overly disturbed by the large crowds. The residents also closed the park gates during these events as in the past groups of people decide they simply don't want to go home when events finish at 2.30am.

Galway is recognised as a student city with approx. 35,000 students. This can cause problems for residents at certain times of the year. Due to the prohibitive cost of socialising in the city, many young people purchase cheap alcohol at local supermarkets and consume it in the park.

In short, the ability to close a gate allows the wider community some level of control and ability to steward the park space.

That is why it is essential to maintain the railings. The railings also allow a degree of separation for the user to step out of the city and into a green oasis. The present park, although devoid of much biodiversity, is largely a green space, but is capable of certain modification. This large amount of green space softens excessive noise and with the lack of so much hard surface, is pleasing to the eye.

Part of the reason that the community initiated this project in 2017 was to deal with many of these problems by redeveloping the park. We would like to believe the city council would take more interest in its future maintenance. The problems are caused by its central location, and wider societal issues in relation to alcohol and a lack of care on behalf of the local authority.

Local Schools use of the park must continue:

It was quite right to see that local schools were consulted to be involved due to their use of the park, as well as the nearby Plots.

Two local community primary schools regularly use Woodquay Park when holding summer classes outside as they have no green open space within their own school campus. The St Nicholas Parochial School at Courthouse Square, as well as the Mercy Primary School at St Francis St, just yards away, regularly use the park for classes because it is a safe quiet location that is particularly used because of its railings and gates, which make it safe for children and their teachers in a city full of car traffic. It is particularly welcomed as a community facility at a time when our young are even more interested in studying biodiversity.

The retention or replacement of some trees and the type of hedging, soft landscaping and fence to be retained are choices to be decided, in cooperation with the Galway City Council's Parks Department Superintendent.

It should be recognised that the area is a most historic part of Galway city which over a hundred years has been drained, reclaimed and filled to create the built area and community we see living there today.

The Woodquay Park you see today was made from infill of one of the channels of the river Corrib at the turn of the last Century. The upper part became the Potato Market as this was surrounded by shops and bars. The lower half was turned into a garden park for the principal benefit of the local community of terraced houses, some with no gardens or open space. This is a small park surrounded by houses.

Woodquay is one of the oldest communities in Galway City, many of its residents are 4th and 5th generation. The Woodquay Residents Association was the 1st Residents Association to be formed in Galway City

This is a time when such historic places should be identified and appropriate signage erected to describe what visitors can see, but do not actually know nor understand?

As it is, An Taisce believes there should be at a minimum, a revision of these plans complete with retention of gates and railings put forward for consideration, before any final plan is agreed to by An Bord Pleanála.

Any plan without the retention of gates, suitable hedges and railings should be refused.

Yours faithfully

Derrick Hambleton



For An Taisce Galway – Planning Committee.

Note: Please ensure that your office send out the acknowledgement to this submission (as required by Article 28(4) of the Planning & Development Regulations 2001 to the following address: An Taisce – Planning Committee c/o 26 Manor Avenue, Kingston, Galway H91 C98X.