

Meeting of the Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage 14th December 2021

1. Good afternoon Cathaoirleach and Members of the Committee and many thanks for inviting Dublin City Council to present to you. I am joined by my colleagues David Dinnigan, Assistant Chief Executive, Housing and Community, Paul Clegg, Executive Manager, Planning and Property Development and John O'Hara, City Planner. As requested I will make a brief statement to the Committee on the following issues: urban regeneration, vacancies, derelict sites, repair and leasing and compulsory purchase orders and along with my City Council colleagues am available to take questions.
2. Ongoing urban regeneration has been a central feature of City Council policy, in response to the widespread dereliction of the 1980's. With the help of the Urban Renewal Act 1986, and other incentives, there have been notable urban renewal and regeneration successes which include Dublin Docklands, the new Grangegorman campus and many more smaller interventions which has enabled the population of the Inner City between the canals to increase by over 50,000 bringing which has increased the vitality of this part of the city.
3. In accordance with both the National Planning Framework and Regional Policy the City Council continues to be proactively engaged in the ongoing regeneration of the city, both at the level of large scale new growth areas and at more local level in relation to vacant sites/infill development.
4. The new draft City Development Plan which is currently on public display sets out a core strategy for the successful growth of our capital City over the next 6 years and beyond. By 2028, the City must provide for an increase in population of approximately 35,000 people. The achievement of the Core strategy requires a proactive commitment to urban regeneration at all levels in the city. The Draft Development Plan identifies 17 Strategic Development and Regeneration Areas (SDRA's) which together have the potential to provide for approx. 35,000 homes with associated jobs and community infrastructure.
5. In addition the Development Plan has identified the need for Strategic Regeneration Plans for the Dublin Industrial Estate, and the "City Edge", Naas Road/Ballyfermot, which is a collaborative project between the City Council and South Dublin County Council.
6. At a more local level the Development Plan seeks the regeneration of brownfield sites throughout the city including vacant and underused sites with the potential for infill housing, mews lanes and vacant upper floors.
7. The regeneration of the Inner City will be greatly enhanced by recent URDF funding for both the North and South Inner City Concept Areas, totalling approx. €170,000,000.
8. Having set out the context of urban regeneration policy in the City I now propose to address issue requested by the Committee.
9. The working definition of residential vacancy used by Dublin City Council is a home that is not occupied and has remained so for longer than 6 months and is not currently marketed for sale or rent by the owner. There are many reasons why a property may be vacant which can include the following:
 - Legal disputes relating to title
 - Disputes and /or wards of court

- Currently for sale
 - Owner residing in long term health care facility
 - Owner does not have resources to bring property up to building standards
10. Dublin City Council is tasked by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to implement a Vacant Homes Action Plan. In response to this requirement and the actions outlined in Rebuilding Ireland under Pillar 5 the City Council has appointed a Vacant Homes Officer and initiated early actions to identify and return to use, vacant homes in its administrative area. This includes active deployment and promotion of the two main market interventions available namely the Repair and Lease and the Buy and Renew Schemes.
 11. In 2017, the City Council undertook a pilot street-survey to test a methodology for identifying vacant homes in four Electoral Divisions. A total of 213 potentially vacant homes were identified. Of those just 49 were confirmed as vacant by neighbours or non-occupants with 16 being confirmed as vacant long-term. Further research was then conducted to consult both DCC and public sources of data to assess the suitability and eligibility of these 16 homes for the incentive schemes. Of these 16, 13 were determined unsuitable for either of the incentive schemes, leaving three homes remaining that may be suitable.
 12. The survey was used to form a realistic view of what is long term residential vacancy and helped diffuse the assumptions that there were over 30,000 plus vacant units in the City as per CSO data. Survey results show Dublin's vacancy is nuanced and often conflated with availability and non-occupancy. For example, a property can be "vacant" in the sense that no one appears to be living there, but upon investigation across a range of sources is actually found to be "occupied" and "in use".
 13. In short this survey research shows that there is “no low hanging fruit” for residential dwellings in Dublin that are vacant and are available for use as social homes. It is understood that the CSO plans to deploy an enhanced approach during the next census in relation to residential properties that appear to be vacant and Revenue will obtain useful information about vacant residential property from the LPT revaluation. Coupled together, this data should provide a more realistic picture of residential vacancy in the city
 14. In relation to the Repair and Lease Scheme, this initiative allows owners of private properties to avail of interest free state loans to refurbish a property to private rented standards and in return lease it as housing stock. While initial public interest in the Scheme was encouraging, once the details of the scheme were published interest declined. 11 applications were received with only 2 completing.
 15. The Buy and Renew Scheme allows the City Council to acquire long term vacant property from private owners at a current market valuation and then refurbish it and return it to use as housing stock in a timely manner. DCC has acquired 68 properties (CPO and Acquisitions) of which 41 have been refurbished and returned to housing stock. An additional 27 properties are currently undergoing refurbishment works and are near to completion with plans to bring an additional 99 into housing stock over the coming years. (accompanying document refers)
 16. Dublin City Council established an Active Land Management Unit in 2016 to provide a more pro-active approach to targeting underutilised, vacant and derelict lands and buildings in the city area. The emphasis is on derelict sites in both private and DCC ownership and undeveloped land generally throughout the city. The public’s view of what constitutes a

derelict site can be very varied and not always in accordance with the legislative definition set out in the Derelict Sites Act 1990. For a site to be determined derelict it must meet the criteria set out in the Derelict Sites Act 1990.

17. In our experience dereliction arises where there are title difficulties, probate issues, owners with personal difficulties, lack of finances, companies in liquidation etc. The Councils approach therefore is to actively engage with owners with a view to agreeing with them what works are required to prevent the property becoming or remaining derelict. This will often produce the required outcomes without the need for the property to go on the register.
18. The Council through the effective exercise of the legislative provisions in the Derelict Sites Act 1990, proactively strives to achieve the eradication of dereliction in the City and the return of derelict sites to active use. The Council has an ongoing acquisition strategy since 2017 but will only acquire compulsorily as a last resort in circumstances where all efforts to secure the carrying out of improvement works by property owners have been exhausted.
19. The number of derelict sites acquired compulsorily is just part of the story, the Council has experienced that in the face of compulsory acquisition some sites have been 1) rendered non-derelict and removed from the Derelict Sites Register, 2) owners are actively seeking planning permission or have obtained planning permission for redevelopment, 3) derelict sites have been placed on the market and are at varying stages in the sales process, which offers the prospect that they will be redeveloped and returned to active use.
20. The Vacant Sites Register was established under the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015. The aim of the Act is to bring vacant land in urban areas into use. The Act imposes a levy on lands suitable for housing and/or regeneration that have not been put forward for development. Since January 2019 sites which meet the vacant site criteria as outlined in the Act and are entered on the VSR for one calendar year are subject to a levy. The levy currently stands at 7% of the market value of the property. There is no interest payable on unpaid levies. It is worth noting that The Act provides for appeals at every step of the process which has the effect of slowing down entry onto the register and applying the levy. The City Council has no power to compulsorily acquire vacant property under the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act and the Act applies to privately owned and publicly owned property in the same manner.
21. The City Council uses its compulsory acquisition powers as part of its Active Land Management Strategy. Recent CPO's include Abbey Street lower/Abbey Theatre Redevelopment, Emmet Road, Ryder's Row and Main Street Chapelizod.

Once again Cathaoirleach, many thanks for allowing me to present this afternoon and myself and my colleagues can expand on the issues raised if requested.

Richard Shakespeare
Deputy Chief Executive