

# PROPOSALS FOR WHITE-WATER RAFTING FACILITY ON STREAM

Dublin needs big ideas, and also needs people with imagination, creativity, bravery and hope to bring forward those ideas without fear of instant attack and condemnation, according to Dublin City Councillor Dermot Lacey. That is one of the reasons why he is strongly supporting the proposed development of a White-Water Rafting Centre for George's Dock.

**T**he pandemic has shown the importance of community, the importance of social interaction and the importance of local government in delivering on both. Anything that enhances local government has my support and anything that enhances Dublin also has my support.

Dublin needs big ideas. It also needs people with imagination, creativity, bravery and hope to bring forward those ideas without fear of instant attack and condemnation and to help create the sort of vibrant, living city that I know Dublin can be. That is one of the reasons why, having listened to the case made, I supported the proposed White-Water Centre Development for Georges Dock.

During the Dublin City Council debate I couldn't help but think back to the first meeting of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (DDDA) Council

in the late 1990s. Sitting in a makeshift office in the middle of dereliction we collectively envisaged a bright future for this then massively deprived and disadvantaged part of Dublin.

Thanks to the enthusiasm and creativity of then Minister for Finance Ruairi Quinn and Minister for the Environment Brendan Howlin, the DDDA Council (comprising city councillors, community representatives, business leaders and others) was given the task of agreeing a masterplan that would reimagine the area. We were told to let our ideas flow. We did.

## NEW-LOOK DUBLIN DOCKLANDS

Harnessing the benefits of the River Liffey, local employment quotas, opening up the Campshires, new community facilities, a Docklands University, a mandatory 20% social and affordable housing requirement



*Dermot Lacey is Leader of the Labour Group on Dublin City Council, a former Lord Mayor of Dublin and also a member of the Dublin Docklands Development Council.*



*The proposed White Water Rafting Centre for the Dublin Docklands shows a 3D model of the new attraction at George's Dock.*



*All studies and experience of similar facilities in Cardiff and Glasgow show that this facility in Dublin will also be a destination for tourist and high spending groups.*

(this was before national legislation requiring similar) were all on our agenda.

Many thought they could never be delivered. In most cases they were. Today Dublin Docklands is a totally different place – with new offices, parks, community facilities, hotels, a theatre and thousands of new homes. And, in particular, I remember the discussion on a Docklands University.

We weren't sure if it could be delivered – but we knew it should be. It was. Over 5,000 new homes will be delivered in the area over time with nearly 3,000 already occupied. Not enough social and affordable housing, but I reckon an awful lot more than would otherwise have been the case.

#### LATEST IN A LINE OF 'BIG IDEAS'

The White-Water Rafting Facility is but the latest in that line of 'Big Ideas'. Critics have bemoaned the cost. They caustically criticise investment in a "tourist facility" that "will only be visited by Dubliners at most once a year". They claim it is an ego trip for canoeists and kayakers or a pet project for the Council Chief Executive.

Anyone who knows my record will know I am no 'Yes' man for any official. Nor am I a 'canoeist' – though I did enjoy a morning attempting it in the remarkable IOAC campsite in Wexford earlier this year! I am someone who passionately believes in securing the best for Dublin and doing what is right for Dublin.

The critics tell us it the centre will be rarely used, and that it will only be for visitors and that it will be too expensive to use. However, how many times a year do families visit the Zoo, the National Aquatic Centre or many such similar facilities? These are special occasional visit destinations. The White-Water rafting facility will be the same.

All studies and experience of similar facilities in Cardiff and Glasgow show that this facility in Dublin will also be a destination for tourist and high spending groups. It will create jobs and generate economic activity. That is the job of Dublin City Council.

#### RING-FENCED FUNDING

People who have never shown an interest in solving our housing crisis seem to claim that the expenditure on this project could eradicate homelessness. It should be noted that the funding that the council is attempting to secure for the facility is already ring-fenced for sports and tourism projects and, as such, is not available for housing and homelessness interventions.

Some councillors, who on every single occasion that they could, have voted to reduce the Local Property Taxes of valuable property owners, at a cost of nearly €100m to the city, now say that spending (at most) a quarter of that on a new recreational facility is wrong. Never mind the approximate €30m lost because the Minister for Finance will not bring properties built since 2013 into the Local Property Tax net.

## VIEWPOINT

Let me repeat some facts. The total cost for the complete project, comprising the white-water rafting facility, two new quality buildings on the Quay and a training centre for Dublin Fire Brigade is estimated at €25m. That is why there is a tender out now seeking expressions of interest.

Dublin City Council is seeking grants of approximately €15m for the project from various sources. This includes sports and tourism funding as well as for the emergency services' element of the project.

### PROJECT GATHERS SUPPORT

The recent decision by Government not to allocate funding from the URDF (Urban Regeneration and Development Fund) was not the setback it was claimed to be, as it never featured in any of the financial projections presented to councillors.

However, support for the project from Fáilte Ireland, which has commissioned consultants to confirm the likely "tourist demand for the facility" was included and is underway.

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage has also given positive signals about the Swift Water Rescue element, while both Sports Ireland and the Olympic Council also support the initiative.

So, let's put all of that into context. Since the rejuvenation of the Dublin Docklands area commenced nearly €3bn of

private investment has been made with more to come. Last year approximately €65m was collected in Local Property Tax in the Dublin City Council area, of which the net benefit to the city was €3.9m.

Commercial rates now collected in the rejuvenated Docklands area amount to well over €60m per annum, while development levies to be collected in the area are expected to exceed €50m.

### CITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The monies proposed to be spent on this innovative centre are a fraction of a fraction of that. We are now heading into a new round of public consultation on the new City Development Plan to chart a way forward for the city for the next six years.

I hope people who do have ideas are not put off by the naysayers and those who know the price of everything and the value of very little. Dublin needs those big ideas. The new proposal to develop a Lido in the location is worthy of consideration and I believe may be possible as part of the overall project. I won't dismiss any ideas big or small.

Yes, the White-Water Rafting Centre is a big idea. It is one I am proud to have voted for and continue to support. I look forward to it opening and, like those who believed we were naive to dream of a Docklands University, to prove them wrong.



All images are courtesy of Dublin City Council and Urban Agency.

*Fáilte Ireland supports the project and has commissioned consultants to confirm the likely "tourist demand for the facility".*