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Save Moore Street from Demolition



7 December 2016

This is a submission on behalf of the Save Moore Street From Demolition campaign, a campaign independent of any political party or organisation, which began life in September 2014 in order to prevent the land swap proposed by the speculator Chartered Land and supported by the Chief Planning Officer of Dublin City Council. When this plan was rejected by a huge majority of city councillors, our campaign moved on to promote the saving of the whole quarter.

Our campaign table has been on Moore Street every Saturday since we began, nowadays between 11.30am and 1.00pm. 116 Saturdays so far and we have collected over 70,000 petition signatures.

In order to look to our vision of the future for Moore Street, we need to look at what it is, what it was, what has been done elsewhere. To that historic and current information, we can add our imagination to see what might be possible in the future.

Moore Street is the last remaining street of a traditional street market quarter which was demolished in the 1970s to make way for the ILAC, essentially a partnership of property speculators and big business chains. That development wiped out the small shops and stalls of that area and their employees.

Ironically, today we once again face a threat to Moore Street from property speculators and big business. The ILAC centre proposes to extend its south end frontage 10 feet into Moore Street. Property speculator landlords give out short-term leases or leave shop spaces empty. And Hammerson, a British-based vulture property speculator, plans to build a huge shopping centre from O'Connell Street to Moore Street and from Parnell Street to Henry Street. The street market is being run down and what was once a bustling street with stall brushing against stall now runs on a mere thirteen licences.

Not only is Moore Street of great value as a living street market in the city centre and of centuries of social history, it also has a tremendous political history. At least nineteen houses in that street and a number of others in lanes running off it were occupied by well over 300 men and women of five organisations in a revolution against the biggest Empire, not only at that time, but to date the biggest Empire the world has ever seen.

Their Proclamation announced a fight for democratic Republic that arguably we have yet to see. They announced the equality of men and women at a time when that too was a rare thing. And the Headquarters of those men and women, originally in the GPO, took their last stand in Moore Street. Volunteers died on the way there and in that very street, as did civilians unlucky enough to come into the sights of British Army rifles and machine guns. Five of the seven signatories of the Proclamation spent their last days of freedom in houses in that street, first No.10 and then, passing

through holes tunneled in the walls, at least as far as No.16, while Volunteers tunneled on to the end of the terrace. And what of The O'Rahilly, dying in that laneway, writing those amazing and heart-wrenching lines of goodbye to his wife and children?

What we have here is social and historical jewel that would be cherished by any administration worthy of it place. If Kilmainham Jail Museum, situated on the outskirts of the city about a half-hour journey from the centre, attracted 330,000 visitors in 2014 and hopes to expand that now to 500,000 annual paying visitors yearly ... How much more could a historic quarter, a real urban battlefield with many original features, right in the middle of the city centre How many more visitors could be attracted to a Moore Street revolutionary quarter historical experience?

Perhaps we should not count the benefits of history and culture in cold cash but, since that is all that a small powerful minority think about, it is worth reflecting that such a development will bring revenue year after year to the nation, while the shopping centre will bring revenue for a few years only to a handful of capitalist chains and speculators.

Developing Moore Street appropriately presents challenges but also opportunities and we would argue that the opportunities are great and exciting. There is the possibility to integrate the development of the historical quarter with the cultural one above it and to combine this development with the creation of a socialising space by day and by night in a part of the city that dies at night.

By day this area could see a playground for small children, given the nearby existence of a number of schools and nurseries, along with craft shops and cafes, not just in Moore Street but all along Moore Lane, for example.

Most social life at night goes south of the river but here in this quarter, with a theatre up the road, a cinema to the east and another to the west, an Asian food quarter nearby, lies the possibility of a north city centre regeneration long talked about but never yet achieved.

It is not to the shopping centres or chain stores that produce deserts at night that we must look to for such a development but to the small businesses – shops, cafes and pubs. And the development needs to be managed so that we don't end up with a Temple Bar or Paddy Power or Guinness souvenir shops.

So who or what can do this? It cannot be property developers nor big business – it needs to be a partnership between small shops, street market stalls, workers and shoppers in the area, nearby residents

It is difficult to imagine such a partnership without the State and local authority's involvement. Yet, what has the local authority done so far? Dublin City Council's Planning Department has approved every single speculator application that has come before it, overriding all formal objections and the recommendations of its elected representatives and ignoring the wishes of the vast majority of people. It is also the Planning Department that squeezes the street market and harasses the stall holders and has not even given them a toilet and washroom in all these years, to say nothing of heating, shelter and electricity.

And what has the State done so far? Until 81 years after the 1916 Rising it gave no recognition whatsoever to the immense historical value of the quarter and then, when it did, through the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, picked only four buildings to declare a national monument, allowed the speculator to let those buildings run down for another eight years, then purchased them but planned to demolish three adjacent houses on the historic site. And erected an illegal banner on the frontage of this historical monument, without planning permission, putting more holes in it than did the machine guns and rifles of the British Army in 1916.

Furthermore, it plans to prepare these houses as a shoebox museum in the middle of a huge shopping centre. And then the Minister went to court, to deny the quarter is a battlefield, to deny any historical importance of any other buildings but those four and, when she lost the case, to appeal the judgement that the whole quarter is of historical importance and a national historical monument.

Any reasonable plan for an appropriate development of the quarter comes to nothing – absolutely nothing – if the Minister's appeal succeeds and the shopping centre is built. You here in this consultative group have an opportunity to make an important contribution. We would suggest to you that the most useful contribution you can possibly make ... is to call on the Minister to abandon her appeal.

Heritage, one of the responsibilities of the Minister's Department, carries an implication of something of value passed on from past generations to the present and from us to the future. Let our bequest to the nation and to the world, to generations to come, be an appropriate historical monument to convey the fullness of what has been and what has happened on this site, as well as an interesting and vibrant quarter by night and day.

Let the bequest of our generations to the future not be another even bigger shopping centre, with a little tacky museum squeezed into it.