

2.00 THE SITE

2.01 Historical note

The new Custom House Docks Area occupies an area of reclaimed land behind the North and East Walls. This land was set out in a series of lots which averaged about 52 ft. wide x 500 ft. deep along the North Wall frontage, and lots approximately twice that size in the area to the north of Mayor Street. The outline of these lots can still be traced in the property boundaries on the former National Sports Centre site. The Custom House Docks site itself is fully described in the original Planning Scheme. Both Connolly Station and the An Post sorting office occupy an area of land which was formerly an integral part of the site.

The quayside area and river have been in active use since the middle of the 18th century. The quays were originally open and did not contain any structures. However in the late 19th and early 20th century a number of warehouse structures were constructed along this area. These were subsequently demolished and the only structure now remaining on Custom House Quay is that which was built originally as the purpose-built terminal for the Jetfoil which was operated by B+I. This building, which dates from 1979, has been converted into a temporary Marketing Centre and offices for the Authority. The quayside area at North Wall is partially occupied by old warehouses which contain some light industrial use. The remaining area is vacant.

Historically, the uses associated with the former National Sports Centre site were those which related to the waterfront activities on the River Liffey, i.e. warehousing, cargo handling, and cattle pens, as well as related retail uses such as public houses. There were some small residential areas associated with the retail uses in the form of overhead living.

The original geometrical grid of lots determined the building form which was characterised by buildings fronting on to North Wall Quay with long, large back yard areas with rear access from Mayor Street. Both Commons Street and Guild Street had long blank side walls with some adulteration in the form of development of small units of housing and retail along Commons Street and Guild Street. However, neither street, nor Mayor Street, developed coherent urban elevations.

The Sheriff Street flats site was originally a large residential area with some workshop activity. It had no very coherent geometrical form to its street pattern and historic maps reveal a haphazard form of development. Most of the area was cleared to allow the building of the Sheriff Street flats. The flats blocks are four storeys in height with deck access and have a very strong architectural character.

2.02 Geotechnical data

A considerable amount of detailed information is now available on the main Custom House Docks site. In addition, five bore holes have been bored on the National Sport Centre site and Dublin Corporation has information on the Sheriff Street flats site.

In general the succession of soil strata and bedrock consists of made ground, estuarine sands and clays, upper gravels, upper glacial till, lower gravels, lower lodgement till and limestone bedrock. In general the made-up ground varies from a depth of 2.3 metres to 4.6 metres. Water levels were discovered at levels ranging between 2.6 metres and 3.5 metres on average below ground level, however, a high water level was discovered towards the eastern end of the National Sports Centre site.

Foundation solutions to date have included pile foundations, deep pad foundations, as well as a raft foundation in the case of the Authority's own offices, which is a lightweight structure, on the quayside.

On the basis of this experience it is not thought that subsoil conditions would present any substantial problems for construction. Water exclusion could become expensive for substructures below a depth of 2.6 to 3 metres over most of the enlarged site, and towards the east near Spencer Dock, any substructure could incur such expense.

Obviously more detailed investigations and analysis would be required for specific projects at an appropriate stage in the development process.

2.03 Services

There is a good infrastructure of services in the surrounding roads and the general area. A very considerable upgrading of most services within the original Custom House Docks site has taken place so that further development within that site is already substantially catered for.

Whilst there is an infrastructure of all normal services on the remaining sites, upgrading will be required, particularly in some localised areas in relation to foul, surface water, and gas mains. However, these areas can take some advantage of recent upgrading that has occurred in both electrical and telecommunications services in the general area.