

DIAGEO SITE

Material for Colloquium on 5th February, 2012

The solution to the development and future use of the 12 acre site presents a major urban challenge. Even though there are various examples of European and International solutions it is considered that a long period of time will be required to come up with a true local response.

A local response is the only one which can be applied. First and foremost the site is located in the historic core of Kilkenny City and is part of the St Canice's and City Centre conservation area.

Given that its history strides Norman, Medieval, Renaissance, Victorian and Industrial (medieval to modern) periods it may be that each and all of these may come into the ultimate planning mix. The particular challenge therefore is to provide a solution that takes all these characteristics and to transpose the site into an "eco district" that would support and propel economic development, employment, entrepreneurship and social health.

A particular concept for the development of the site and its sister site across the river (KMART) is based on the EU Commitment to Sustainability (Ref Europe 2020 Strategy). The focus on sustainability is a relatively new priority for EU Cities and will require a rethinking of past approaches. The Diageo and Mart sites provide an opportunity for this rethink. It is argued that any successful strategy for urban areas needs to face the fact most current infrastructure for transport, energy and housing as well as manufacturing and services is unsustainable and that new sustainable infrastructure is required.

A perspective on planning for the development of the site(s) is based on a number of themes.

Agenda 21 and Citizen Participation

From the outset we should commit to clear adherence to a collectively designed project. This involves reconfiguring the roles of public institutions and citizens so that awareness can be raised locally of the challenges and importance of sustainable development. In adopting this approach it may be possible to arrive at consensus on a number of critical issues like:-

- Reducing the environmental footprint
- Combating growing inequalities and addressing social cohesion and development
- Ensuring accessibility and mobility strategies
- Preservation of heritage (ecclesiastical and industrial)

- Public open spaces and use of river
- Housing, retail, education.

“Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody only because and only when they are created by everybody”

Kilkenny’s New “Eco District”

The potential for creating an urban heating network (district heating) is a goal that should be identified and followed up from an early stage.

The provision of “green future houses”, passive houses and zero carbon buildings on foot of the European Commission Energy Road Map 2050 should form a key part of a local area plan for the site. The principle of establishing a sustainable energy community, de nova on a brown field site, would also have the twin aim of averting future fuel poverty should there be housing on this site or the K mart site.

Heritage – Ecclesiastical, Medieval and Industrial

The Diageo site is remarkable because of its rich history of water based industry from early times. The Franciscan Abbey, Evans Turret and the Mill ruins all hold the key to the history of the locality and will dictate to some extent the physical planning and urban design of the site. This holds true for the industrial heritage of the site. The beer tasting building adjacent to St. Francis Abbey will be retained as a component of the site. The physical planning of the site will be required to reflect the status of the Abbey and pathways to the river used by the early Christian monks.

The River and Public Amenity

The transfer of the site to Kilkenny Local Authorities will present a planning opportunity to make significant and lasting improvements to the environment and riverside amenity between Greens Bridge and Bateman Quay. The removal of the existing industrial buildings will bring the river front to centre stage in the physical development of the site.

In addition to the riverside green belt there is also potential for the development of small size urban park or green area for use by the local community. The development of the small park would unite the Abbey with Evans turret and provide a very good opportunity to add to the current and familiar Medieval experience in Kilkenny.

Economic Development and Entrepreneurship

This is the most difficult part of forming a vision for the site as so much depends on external economic factors, on population growth, on demand for local services and government policy over a protracted period of time.

The Diageo site is ideally located for mixed uses including a combination of institutional, educational, office, small business and neighbourhood retail. Entertainment could also be considered given the value of the riverside frontage.

The provision or specific zoning of arts/ crafts and small entrepreneurship zones could be a runner.

Housing in the form of living over the shop would probably be most appropriate but given that the Kmart site is only 250 metres away a synergy between the sites could emerge whereby one could be substantially business and the other substantially residential.

Site Infrastructure

The site is well served by water supply, waste waters services, surface water disposal, powers supply and telecommunication services. The construction of the Kilkenny Central Access Scheme will provide much improved vehicular access to the site from the northern aspect. There are no obstacles to the long term development of the site. From an economic perspective it is sensible that the aggregate area of say 18 acres between the Diageo and Kmart is identified in the current planning environment for additional housing need in the city and its environs. The cost of servicing is far lower and more efficient than ex urban locations around the perimeter of the city.

Interim Uses of Site

It can be expected that there will be no development on the site for quite a number of years. In the meantime perhaps over the course of the next six or seven years consideration could be given to the provision of a bus/coach park to cater for visitors to St. Canices Cathedral.